The BHAGAVAD GITA

Translated from the Sanskrit, with Notes, Comments, and Introduction

by

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RAMAKRISHNA-VIVEKANANDA CENTER

THE BHAGAVAD GITA

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First Printing, May 1944
Second Printing, November 1944

Printed in the United States of America
by The Haddon Craftsmen, Inc.

FOREWORD

No translation of Plato is definitive; no translation of the Tao Teh King; no translation of the Bhagavad Gītā. The more searching and impressive a work, the more it is impossible to convey, in any one version in another tongue, its full meaning. For that reason, the great classics of meditation require ever new translations, and each one adds a facet to the total sense. A new translation is always sufficiently formidable a task to deter anyone lacking in devotion, especially if he is familiar with the labors of his predecessors. A new translation of a great work, by a competent scholar, is therefore to be received with gratitude. It is especially to be welcomed if he has avoided, as I think Swami Nikhilananda has avoided, the warping of new translations by old: where a previous translator has hit upon a happy expression, a later translator is often constrained to avoid that expression, to seek the different solely for the sake of differing. The translation here given seems to me to be natural and direct, conveying the sense in admirably idiomatic English. At the same time, there has been no hesitation about using a few Sanskrit terms, such as dharma, yoga, māyā, essentially untranslatable, whose meaning the reader readily acquires.

No one who desires to grasp the spirit of religious aspiration of India can afford to remain unacquainted with this, "The Lord's Song." It is, in a sense, the New Testament of Hinduism. It had an important message to a people whose religious ideal tended to be contemplative and mystical, who had the genius to reveal to the world that ultimate goal for thought and reverence sometimes called "The Absolute," the One without a second. Its message was the meaning

of action, the justification even of warfare in the light of union with the Ultimate.

It is therefore the direct answer to those who identify the Indian spirit with that sort of mysticism which involves retreat from the world of affairs. Its position, as that one of the world's classics most intimately known by so many millions, is assurance that its temper is indicative of the inner quality of modern India.

This fact lends a special interest to the commentary which accompanies the text. It is an adaptation from the extended commentary of Śankarāchārya, the greatest exponent of the Vedānta system of philosophy in its strictly monistic form. There can be no doubt about the profundity of Śankara's work, its great philosophical importance, and its permanent message to a world tempted to the distractions of pluralism. In my personal judgment, Śankara missed the peculiar message of the Bhagavad Gītā above referred to: his comments attempt to bring the Gītā back to the supremacy of meditation over action as the condition of union with God. (p. 102) To scholars, this tug between differing points of view will add a spice of historical piquancy to the work. To the average reader, the effect of the difference may be confusing. Many of these comments, moreover, directed as they are to an India of the ninth century of our era, may appear either unnecessary or unenlightening to the man of today. If so, let him consider that the service to American scholarship in presenting Śankara's view of the Gītā in such close relation to the text will surely justify a hurdle so easily taken.

May this majestic poem find its way into the familiar literary friendship of many readers, and contribute to the sense of spiritual kinship with the most gifted people of Asia, akin to us both in blood and in language.

William Ernest Hocking

PREFACE

The aim of this new translation of the Bhagavad Gītā is to present the book to the English-speaking public of the Western world as a manual of Hindu religion and philosophy. To achieve that purpose, notes and explanations have been added to the text, and the connexion of thought between the verses has been shown, wherever that seemed necessary. The explanations follow, in the main, the commentary on the Gītā by Śankarāchārya. Abstruse and technical portions of the commentary have been omitted as of no particular interest to most readers of the book.

There has also been included the story of the *Mahābhārata,* which will acquaint the student of the Gītā with its background and with the character of Sri Krishna. The bewilderment many students feel at the choice of a battle-field for the unfolding of a scheme of the Highest Good and liberation will, it is hoped, be removed by a perusal of the story.

In the Introduction the translator has made an attempt to explain some of the philosophical concepts of the Gītā, such as the meaning of duty, its place in the moulding of the spiritual life, and the meaning of action and actionlessness from the relative and the absolute standpoint.

The diacritical table will help Occidental students in the pronunciation of unfamiliar Sanskrit words. The glossary will enable them to understand the meaning of Sanskrit expressions left in the text and notes for want of equivalents in English. It is hoped that they will simplify the problems faced by Westerners in studying the Bhagavad Gītā.

There are in existence many English translations of the Bhagavad Gītā. The present translator has prof-

itably consulted two of these, one by D. S. Sarma and the other by A. Mahadeva Sastri. In addition, he has looked into *Essays on the Gita* by Sri Aurobindo. The works of Margaret E. Noble (Sister Nivedita) and Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy have proved useful in the writing of the story of the *Mahābhārata.* He has also received invaluable help from Mr. Denver Lindley and Mr. Joseph Campbell, who revised the manuscript. It is a real pleasure to acknowledge the translator's indebtedness to them all.

Humanity is now passing through a critical stage of transition. Many branches of physical science, psychology, sociology, and humanism are placing every day at our disposal a wealth of facts of which hitherto we have been unaware. They need collation and synthesis in order to be useful to the life of the individual and society. There is also the primal antithesis between this world and the other world, between secular duties and spiritual values. Men are confused and picture life as full of shreds and patches. But they feel a profound need of seeing life as a seamless garment. To those who sincerely seek, the Bhagavad Gītā may be a means of coordinating these apparently contradictory facts.

Nikhilananda

New York
November 1, 1943

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[1] In the original every chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā is called a yoga, or way of union with God.

NOTE ON THE PRONUNCIATION OF SANSKRIT WORDS

a has the sound of *o* in *come.*
ā " " " " *a* in *far.*
e " " " " *e* in *bed.*
ī " " " " *ee* in *feel.*
o " " " " *o* in *note.*
u " " " " *u* in *full.*

ai, ay has the sound of *oy* in *boy.*
au " " " " *o* pronounced deep in the throat.
ch " " " " *ch* in *church.*
ḍ " " " " hard *d* in English.
g " " " " *g* in *god.*
jn " " " " hard *gy* in English.[1]
ś " " " " *sh* in *shut.*
sh may be pronounced as in English.
t and d are soft as in French.
th has the sound of *t-h* in *boat-house.*

Other consonants appearing in the transliterations may be pronounced as in English.

[1] Jnāna is pronounced as *gyāna.*

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INTRODUCTION

By SWAMI NIKHILANANDA

The Bhagavad Gītā, popularly known as the Gītā, comprises eighteen chapters—the twenty-fifth through the forty-second—of the section on Bhishma in the *Mahābhārata*. It takes the form of a dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna on the battle-field of Kurukshetra. The setting of the battle-field contributes a dramatic element to the book and relates religion to the realities of life.

The Gītā is one of the most important religious classics of the world. Hindus of all sects and denominations revere the book. It is read daily by unnumbered Hindus for spiritual inspiration and is held in the highest esteem by all—men and women, young and old, householders and monks.

The teacher of the Gītā is Krishna, who is regarded by the Hindus as the supreme manifestation of the Lord Himself. Ideal friend, wise teacher, far-seeing statesman, devout yogi, and invincible warrior, Krishna harmonizes in His character the various conflicting activities of life. He is the most highly esteemed religious prophet in India.

From the human standpoint Krishna and Arjuna are friends and companions; but in a deeper sense they are one soul in two bodies, two aspects of the one Reality, each incomplete without the other. Their conjoined forms are still worshipped in India under the name of Pārtha-sārathi, Krishna as Arjuna's charioteer. Again, at the shrine of Vadri-Nārāyana, in an almost inaccessible part of the Himālayas, they are worshipped as Nara-Nārāyana, Arjuna as Nara,

Man, and Krishna as Nārāyana, God. The two, God-Man, form the total picture of the Godhead.

There are many who regard the story behind the Gītā not as historical fact but as an allegory. To them Arjuna represents the individual soul, and Sri Krishna the Supreme Soul dwelling in every heart. Arjuna's chariot is the body. The blind King Dhritarāshtra is the mind under the spell of ignorance, and his hundred sons are man's numerous evil tendencies. The battle, a perennial one, is between the power of good and the power of evil. The warrior who listens to the advice of the Lord speaking from within will triumph in this battle and attain the Highest Good.

The Upanishads, the Gītā, and the Brahma-sutras —technically known as the three prasthānas—form the bed-rock of Vedānta philosophy. These religious classics are, as a rule, read by the monks of the Vedānta school, who have renounced the world in quest of Truth. Many commentaries have been written on these texts by the celebrated philosophers of India. According to Hindu tradition, a philosopher or sage seeking to preach a new doctrine must gain his support from the Upanishads, the Gītā, and the Brahma-sutras, which alone are the valid authorities on supersensuous truths. Among the most important commentators on these books may be counted Śankarāchārya (A.D. 788-820), Rāmānujāchārya (A.D. 1017-1137), and Maddhvāchārya (A.D. 1199-1276), generally known as Śankara, Rāmānuja, and Maddhva. Each of them has explained the ancient teaching differently. The soul and the world are spoken of by the non-dualist Śankara as one with Brahman, or Ultimate Reality; by Rāmānuja, the upholder of Qualified Non-dualism, as parts of Reality; and by the dualist Maddhva, as different from Reality. According to the commentators themselves, these views are mutually

incompatible and exclusive. Nevertheless they need not be; for man's relationship with Ultimate Reality is relative to his conception of himself. When he identifies himself with the body, then he is certainly different from God. (Dualism.) When he regards himself as a living being, then he is a part of the Universal Life. (Qualified Non-dualism.) But when he realizes that he is incorporeal Spirit, beyond time, space, and causality, then he is one with the Universal Spirit. (Non-dualism.) Apparently the Gītā accepts all three views as pertaining to man's various stages of spiritual evolution.

The present translator, in his notes and comments, has followed, in the main, Śankara's commentary. Śankarāchārya, called Śankara for short, is one of the brightest stars in the firmament of India. He is one of the pillars of the Eternal Religion of the Hindus. Unfortunately, very little is known of the life of this wonderful man. The scholars are by no means unanimous about the date of his birth. According to one celebrated Hindu scholar[1] he was born about the middle or the end of the sixth century, and according to another[2] in A.D. 680 or a few years earlier. According to some European scholars[3] he was born in A.D. 788 and died in 820.

Śankara belonged to the simple, scholarly, and industrious Nāmbudri sect of brāhmins of Mālābar in south India. The village of Kālādi, on the west coast of the peninsula, is pointed out as his birth-place. Even while a boy he showed utter indifference to material pleasures and renounced the world at an early age in quest of Truth. He found his teacher, Govindapāda, on the bank of the river Narmadā and was initiated

[1] Telang.
[2] Sir R. G. Bhāndārkār.
[3] Max Müller and Professor Macdonell.

by him into the life of a wandering monk. Soon he completely mastered the sacred lore of the Vedas, the Upanishads, and the other scriptures of Hinduism. He wrote commentaries to elucidate the texts of the Bhagavad Gītā, the Brahma-sutras, and the ten principal Upanishads. He became the personification of Vedic wisdom and a strong upholder of the Non-dualistic system of Vedānta.

It was the twilight of Buddhism. Various superstitious practices and corrupt rituals passed as religion. Śankara travelled over the length and breadth of India, challenging the heretics and engaging in discussion with the leaders of the rival schools. Everywhere he was triumphant. He practised yoga and came to possess many supernatural powers. He reformed the monastic order of Hinduism and established four monasteries, the chief of which is at Sringeri in Mysore. The others are at Puri in the east, Dwārakā in the west, and Badarināth in the Himālayas. Though an ascetic, he was nevertheless full of the milk of human kindness and filial affection. In open defiance of the rules that govern the order of sannyāsis, Śankara performed the funeral rites of his mother and thus incurred the serious displeasure of his community. Though an uncompromising non-dualist and an upholder of the nameless and formless Absolute, yet, out of deference to the feelings of ordinary devotees, he composed many soul-stirring hymns in praise of different gods and goddesses of popular Hinduism, never failing to point out that these deities are manifestations of the great, all-pervading Spirit. The life of Śankara in an inexplicable manner reconciles contraries. He was a philosopher and a poet, a savant and a saint, a mystic and a religious reformer, a lover of God and a debater of rare forensic power. According to tradition, this great man

died at Kedārnāth, in the Himālayas, at the age of thirty-two.

One may read the Gītā without the help of any commentary, comprehend its meaning in a general way, and feel its uplifting influence; but the commentaries reveal much of the subtlety, grandeur, depth, and sublimity that would otherwise remain hidden. Without the help of the commentaries it is sometimes impossible to discover the thread that connects the verses and the chapters. The text of the Gītā well serves the purpose of daily devotional reading; but the commentaries help one to sound its depths.

No amount of critical study, however, will enable a reader to grasp the real meaning of the Gītā unless he is equipped with the four qualifications laid down for the spiritual aspirant. He must possess the power of discriminating between the Real and the unreal; he must cultivate will to renounce the unreal; he must be endowed with the "six spiritual virtues," namely, control of the senses, control of the mind, forbearance, withdrawal from the distracting objects of the world, faith, and one-pointedness of mind; lastly, he must have an intense longing for liberation from the illusory experiences of the relative world. Equipped with these four qualifications, he may come to understand the profound meaning of the scripture. Spirituality is the transformation of life, not the satisfaction of intellectual curiosity. It is being and becoming, not mere knowing. Really to know God is to be God.

The story is told of an illiterate farmer who one day was listening to a learned exposition of the Gītā apparently without understanding a word of the interpretation. But tears flowed down his cheeks. On being asked the cause of his emotion, the farmer said that while the pundit was explaining the Gītā he clearly saw Arjuna's chariot on the battle-field of Kurukshetra

and the Lord instructing him in divine wisdom. It was true that he did not grasp the scholar's interpretation. Nevertheless his ignorance of the letter did not stand in the way of his understanding the spirit of the book. The inwardness of mind necessary to probe the meaning of the Gītā is acquired through the practice of self-control and contemplation.

What are the form and content of the book? The Bhagavad Gītā, which literally means the Song of the Lord, is not a formal theology or a cut-and-dried system of philosophy. One does not find in the book consistency even in the use of certain important words, such as yoga, Brahman, and Ātman. The Gītā is written in the form of an inspired dialogue; it is that living dialogue which the discerning man finds going on constantly in his own heart between his everyday worldly self and his higher Self. To such a student it appears that he himself is raising the questions, which are then answered by the Lord within. The book's power of suggestion is without limit if it is approached in the proper spirit. One feels that Arjuna's dilemma and confusion are one's own and that the Lord's words are addressed to oneself from the continuous revelation going on within every human heart.

The Gītā is a yogashāstra, a scripture on yoga. The word "yoga," still much abused in Europe and America, denotes the union of individual soul with Universal Soul, and also the means to such union. Hence yoga is the goal of all religions and the basis of all religious practices. It implies much more than religion in its usual sense. Instead of laying down creeds and doctrines for acceptance by religious aspirants, it emphasizes the psychological approach to self-unfoldment. Thus yoga takes into consideration the different types of human minds—the active, the philosophical, the emotional, and the psychic—and expounds for them,

respectively, the path of work (karmayoga), the path of knowledge (jnānayoga), the path of love or devotion (bhaktiyoga), and the path of concentration and self-control (rājayoga). Each of these paths opens upon the infinite horizon of Truth and effects the union of man with God. The Gītā describes them all.

The Gītā is called the Brahmavidyā, the Science of the Absolute, and the mokshashāstra, the scripture dealing with liberation. Though its immediate purpose is to persuade Arjuna to follow the path of a worldly duty, yet its message is the message of Truth and salvation. The problems discussed are philosophical and metaphysical: God, the soul, the hereafter, evolution, matter, Spirit, duty, social service, and the rest. Man is understood as an integral whole whose activities and feelings are not to be departmentalized. Even his most trivial work cannot be understood or evaluated unless it is related to the very root of his being. The aim of Krishna's teaching is to remove the doubts and delusions that overpower man in everything, great or small; but these can be removed only through a realization of Truth. Thus alone can a man be prepared to face the world and his duty with the strength and understanding derived from the consciousness of God dwelling in his heart.

The Gītā is a compendium of the essential meaning of the Vedas, India's Book of Wisdom. Here one finds the fairest flowers of the Vedas cleared of the weeds and underbrush of rituals, ceremonies, and myths. The aphoristic nature of the Gītā makes it easy for the student to recall its teachings for the purpose of meditation or for inspiration at critical moments of indecision and bewilderment.

The God preached by the Gītā is universal and all-inclusive. "Its hands and feet are everywhere; Its eyes, heads, and faces are everywhere; Its ears are

everywhere; Its existence envelops all." Yet to Him we look for succour in time of need. "I am the Goal and the Support; the Lord and the Witness; the Abode, the Refuge, and the Friend; I am the origin and the dissolution; the ground, the storehouse, and the Imperishable Seed." He is the impersonal Power behind the universe. "The Light even of lights, It is said to be beyond darkness. As knowledge, the object of knowledge, and the goal of knowledge, It is set firm in the hearts of all." "The light that is in the sun and illumines the whole universe, the light that is in the moon and is likewise in fire—know that light to be Mine." He animates the whole of Nature. As He sustains the macrocosm, so also does He sustain the microcosm. Nevertheless His true nature is transcendent and beyond human comprehension. Only a portion of Him is manifest in the universe. The all-pervading, incomprehensible, transcendental Consciousness appears to man as a Personal God and requires from him single-minded love unstained by worldliness. "Whosoever offers Me, with devotion, a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water—that I accept, the pious offering of the pure in heart."

That religion is an opiate—a frequent criticism—is refuted by the Gītā. The spiritual aspirant must work, and work incessantly, both for individual liberation and for the stability of the world order. "Neither let your motive be the fruit of action, nor let your attachment be to non-action"—is Sri Krishna's warning to those who mistake inertia for spirituality. Inertia, indolence, and inadvertence are the three worst enemies of spiritual life and are more harmful than the majority of the notorious sins. The aim of Sri Krishna's teachings was to rescue Arjuna from his dreamy ideal of a recluse's life and make him plunge into a whirl of activity, where the grimmest facts of existence were

to be faced and accepted. From the sequel we know that Sri Krishna did not sow His seed on barren soil. After listening to the instruction Arjuna said: "My delusion is gone. I have regained my memory through Your grace, O Krishna. I am firm; I am free from doubt. I will act according to Your word." Work, or duty, is not the enemy of spiritual life; the real enemy is ignorance, the mother of attachment and delusion. "May He awaken our understanding," one of the earliest prayers of the Vedas, is still repeated every day by millions of Hindus.

Throughout the Gītā, Sri Krishna urges Arjuna to perform his duty on the battle-field. The warrior was confused regarding the nature of duty. Must a man cling to his worldly duties even if they bring suffering and pain to himself and others? Does not duty often create friction and irritation? Is it not our true duty to cast off duties and follow the line of least resistance in a life of non-activity? This was Arjuna's dilemma; and this is the dilemma we often face in our everyday life. Arjuna's confusion was due to his attachment and egotism. And also he was frightened, to some extent, by the presence of the powerful combatants on the opposing side. Sri Krishna points out to Arjuna the imperative nature of duty and its usefulness as a spiritual discipline. But it is not the Stoic ideal of duty for duty's sake that Sri Krishna preaches, rather the spiritual ideal of duty for God's sake. Duty must be performed to please God alone; brooding over the result has nothing to do with the performance of duty. God is immanent in the universe. He is the indwelling Soul of all beings. Therefore the Upanishad says: "The husband is dear to the wife, not for the sake of the husband, but for the sake of the Lord in the husband. The wife is dear to the husband, not for the sake of the wife, but for the sake of the Lord

in the wife." So every duty is an act of worship. Duty performed in this spirit confers joy upon the doer irrespective of success or failure. There is a joy in being made an instrument of God, there is a joy in being used by Him, and there is a joy in being set aside when the instrument is broken or has served its purpose.

Here we come to the main discipline of the Gītā for the attainment of liberation. It is karmayoga, or the performance of work as a yoga, a method of communion with the Godhead. Everyone must work. Inactivity is impossible for an embodied being. His eating, his moving, and even the functioning of his bodily organs, mean action. Work is the effective means of self-expression in the relative world. Even God Himself is an ever active Power. "I have, O Pārtha, no duty; there is nothing in the three worlds that I have not gained and nothing that I have to gain. Yet I continue to work." But behind a man's work there may be different motives. He may work for his own satisfaction, or he may work to please God. In the former case he regards his individualized self as the doer, is elated by success and depressed by failure, and clings to the result, which is the satisfaction of the doer himself. In the latter case he knows that the Lord alone is the Doer, and himself only His instrument; he then works viewing alike success and failure, for the fruit of the action belongs to God alone. Egocentric action creates bondage for the doer, whereas action performed to please God leads to liberation. Through such action the heart becomes pure, and the man of pure heart acquires the fitness to cultivate Self-knowledge. Through Self-knowledge he attains liberation. This is called karmayoga, the performance of duty as a yoga. Yoga is the secret of work. To remain unperturbed in success and failure is yoga.

All actions can be performed as yoga. Even an apparently violent action, inflicting suffering on others, as on a battle-field, can be a yoga and therefore spiritual, if the motive is not the aggrandizement of the individual or communal or national ego, but the establishment of truth and justice.

The relative universe consists of pairs of opposites—good and evil, pain and pleasure, virtue and vice, life and death. They are like the two sides of the same coin and are indispensable to complete the picture of the world. A perfect world, containing goodness or happiness alone, is a contradiction in terms; an undisturbed balance is possible only in the state of dissolution. The act of creation begins precisely when that balance is lost. When everybody will be perfect the world will cease to exist. The only active and intelligent Agent behind these ceaseless activities of the universe is the Lord Himself. His will alone is operative in every action. He is the only conscious Entity that exists; but He acts through embodied beings, using them as His instruments. In His foreordaining mind everything that is to be accomplished has already been accomplished. Both past and future are only a present moment in His infinite Consciousness. For the purpose of carrying out His plans in the relative world, He chooses different beings for different actions, apparently good or evil, according to their inborn dharmas. He expects them to be conscious of their instrumental nature. Men suffer because they regard themselves as doers. When once they realize that the Lord alone is the Doer, then their duty, whatever its nature may be, will bring them joy and satisfaction. It will bring them spiritual success. "By worshipping Him through the performance of duty does a man attain perfection." Man is essentially of the nature

of God. Therefore any work done for the satisfaction of God must also satisfy man's true Self.

In the Gītā, Sri Krishna emphasizes svadharma, one's own dharma. The word "dharma" is really untranslatable. "Religion," "duty," "righteousness," and the other English equivalents give only a partial meaning. Dharma is derived from the root *dhri*, meaning to hold or sustain. The word signifies the attitude behind a man's action or duty that sustains him in his present stage of evolution and also helps him to realize his ultimate destiny. The dharma of a man is determined by his past experiences and tendencies. The beginningless Soul assumes different forms in different births for the gaining of experience. The works performed in every birth leave impressions, which are stored up in the subconscious mind and are not destroyed with the death of the body. When the Soul assumes a new body, these impressions begin to operate. Thus they form his svabhāva, or character; they determine his dharma—his duty, his religion, his sense of right and wrong. Education and environment only help a man to manifest what he has inherited from his own past. Heredity supplies him with the physical means of working out his dharma. So a man's dharma is the basis of his thought and action; he cannot get rid of it any more than a dreaming person can get rid of his dream. To try to act against one's dharma is to do violence to one's nature. The duty determined by a man's dharma is his natural duty. That is the only real thing for him; all other duties are alien to his nature, imposed from outside and therefore sources of confusion. Krishna asks Arjuna to cling to his kshatriya dharma though it does not seem perfect from other standpoints. "Better is one's own dharma, though imperfectly performed, than the dharma of another well performed. Better is death in the doing

of one's own dharma: the dharma of another is fraught with peril." "He who does the duty ordained by his own nature incurs no sin." As a poisonous substance does not injure the worm born in that substance, so he who acts according to his inborn dharma does not incur evil.

Dharma impels a man to righteous or unrighteous actions, which produce good or evil results. Both the evil and the good operate as barriers to the Knowledge of Reality, which is transcendent and beyond such pairs of opposites. Dharma and adharma, righteousness and unrighteousness, may be compared to clouds of different thickness that hide the resplendent sun: *what is called good is only a lesser evil.* The light of the sun is seen in its full brilliance only when the clouds are totally removed. Likewise, the true glory of the Self is perceived only when the mind remains free from all the tendencies created by its good as well as its evil actions. This condition of mind is produced when a man acts according to his dharma in a spirit of utter detachment. The organs may then be active, but the mind does not retain the slightest impression of the action. This is the meaning of Sri Krishna's advice to Arjuna to work and surrender the results to the Lord. *It is the only way to exhaust the past* tendencies and at the same time prevent the formation of new ones. By freeing the mind of attachment and delusion a man ultimately realizes that his supreme dharma is to worship God, and God alone. "Abandon all dharmas and come to Me alone for shelter. I will deliver you from all sins; do not grieve." Thus, through our worldly dharma, we acquire fitness to perform the supreme duty of human evolution, which is the attainment of Self-knowledge.

The great Śankara, in his commentary on the Gītā, describes perfection, or liberation, as a state of action-

lessness or non-activity. He repeatedly asserts, throughout the book, that action and Self-knowledge are incompatible. This philosophical position taken by him has created a great deal of controversy in East and West alike. It would seem that this confusion is mainly due to a misunderstanding of "inactivity" and "Self-knowledge" as used by Śankara. He nowhere denies the place of action for the security of the world order. He clearly says in his Introduction to the Gītā that, after creating the world, the Lord taught men both the dharma of action and the dharma of renunciation in order to ensure the stability of society; for both are necessary to man's welfare. Through action man attains worldly well-being, and through renunciation the Highest Good. But a man will not seek the Highest Good unless, through experience, he has realized the illusory nature of worldly prosperity. Action becomes, for a spiritual aspirant, a dharma, or means of Self-knowledge, only when he performs it in a spirit of detachment, knowing that God alone is the Doer and man His instrument. Otherwise action feeds greed and lust, produces chaos and confusion, and ultimately brings about the destruction of the world.

According to Śankara, the Ātman, or Soul, in Its essential nature, is one with Brahman, the Absolute. It is pure, luminous, eternal, and free. Birthless and deathless, It is beyond time, space, and causality. It is Spirit and Consciousness, and One without a second. Being the embodiment of Perfection, Bliss, and Peace, It neither changes nor acts. But Brahman, or Ātman, *appears* to be active on account of the inscrutable māyā—a mysterious power, inhering in Brahman, which makes the One appear to have become many, the Absolute to have become the relative. The creation and multiplicity are due to māyā. Through its influence names and forms are falsely superimposed upon Brah-

man. As long as one sees the slightest trace of duality, one is dwelling in the realm of ignorance, or māyā.

Action, described in the Gītā as incompatible with Self-knowledge, or perfection, is always associated with the triple consciousness of a doer, an instrument, and a result. In every action undertaken by an unillumined or ignorant person these three factors are inevitably present. The knowledge of the non-dual Soul, or Brahman, is incompatible with the knowledge of multiplicity. According to Śankara a knower of Brahman cannot perform any action characterized by multiplicity. That is why Self-knowledge is incompatible with activity.

Furthermore, a man endowed with Self-knowledge feels no incentive to action, such as the attainment of the desirable, the relinquishment of the undesirable, the reforming of the impure, or the changing of one substance into another. All these incentives are found only in the relative world characterized by good and evil, pain and pleasure, and the other pairs of opposites. An illumined person sees Brahman, or Perfection, everywhere—both within and without. There exists for him no imperfection or evil that he might change or destroy; for if he sees anywhere even a trace of evil, he has not attained the Knowledge of Brahman.

Other motives of action, such as inner restlessness, boredom, a haunted conscience, the desire for name and fame, and the desire for "self-expression," are totally absent in a man of Knowledge, who has found peace within and without and is constantly aware of the blissful nature of the Soul.

In his commentaries on the Gītā, the Upanishads, and the Brahma-sutras, Śankara often says that action is proper only for an ignorant person. He uses the words "ignorant" and "action" in a special sense. The

word "ignorant" (avidyā) does not have the connotation "uneducated," but applies to a person who has not realized the complete identity of his soul with Brahman, or the Absolute. According to Śankara, the knowledge of Non-duality is the only real knowledge. All other forms of knowledge, associated with duality, are ignorance. Consistent with his theory of Non-dualism, which also is corroborated by the inner experience of many seers of Truth, Śankara characterizes even the highest experience of dualism as stained by ignorance. The word "action" in this connexion refers only to that action which recognizes the multiplicity of a doer, an instrument, and a result.

It seems to be the consensus of opinion of Indian spiritual teachers that an unillumined or ignorant person, for the purification of his heart, follows karmayoga, that is to say, performs action looking upon himself as an instrument of the Lord and surrendering to Him the fruits of action. As a result of karmayoga he gradually frees himself from ego, greed, and passion. As his heart becomes purer, he takes less interest in outside activities and pays more heed to meditation and contemplation. His attention is diverted from the outer life to the inner life. His outer activities are confined to the bare maintenance of the body, the entire mind being directed to contemplation of the Lord. Through such intense spiritual practice his heart becomes entirely pure, and the purity of heart is instantaneously followed by the attainment of Knowledge. Thus karmayoga plays a vital part in the realization of Self-knowledge. Śankara nowhere shows disdain for karmayoga.

Does a man endowed with Self-knowledge, then, remain inactive or inert like an inanimate object? That would be absurd. Inertia is a condition of weariness, indolence, or sleep. It is utterly absent in Brah-

man, or Ātman, which is all Knowledge-Existence-Bliss Absolute. No two beings are further apart than a seer of Truth and a stone. As dualistic action is incompatible with Brahman, so too is inertia. As a knower of Brahman cannot work from any external motive, neither can he remain actionless, like a stone or stump. Then how does he move and live in the world? All this has been vividly described by Sri Krishna in the Gītā. (II, 55-72; XIV, 22-27)

What Śankara emphasizes is that a man endowed with Self-knowledge is free from all trace of duality—the illusory notions of a doer, an instrument, and a result of action. His activity is really the same as his Knowledge of Reality. In every phase of action, in its every accessory, he sees nothing but Infinite Brahman. The action that is free from the notion of a doer, an instrument, and a result is Knowledge itself. "He who sees inaction in action, and action in inaction, he is wise among men, he is a yogi, and he has performed all action."

The important thing to remember here is that the emphasis is laid on the knowledge that inspires the action and not on the outer action itself. An ignorant person and a knower of Brahman may seem to engage in the same kind of work, for instance, eating or sleeping; but whereas the former may see in his action the presence of the ego or various material factors, the latter sees in it only Brahman. It is Knowledge that distinguishes a wise man from an ignorant.

In a man endowed with Self-knowledge, eternal peace and eternal action are harmonized in an inexplicable manner. Such a man works as God Himself works. The whirlwind activities of the universe touch only the periphery of the Godhead, whose inner being is of the nature of Peace. Śankara himself is an example of this. A knower of Brahman, he was far from

being an inactive man. As from a higher standpoint of physical science one cannot distinguish matter from energy, so also from the standpoint of the Absolute, one cannot distinguish non-activity from activity. The most intense form of movement often creates an illusion of immobility. Any discussion of the Absolute or attempt to understand It through the dialectics of the relative world will bristle with contradiction.

Śankara knows the value of action in the unfoldment of spiritual life. He recommends again and again the path of work for the ignorant and the beginners, for those in whose minds the idea of multiplicity is firmly impressed. Those who see the duality of good and evil must work to eliminate evil till they realize that good and evil are two inseparable entities, two inescapable factors of the relative world. They may engage, according to their temperaments, in ritualistic worship or philanthropic action. Those conscious of worldly responsibilities may do their duties to their family, community, or country. But the Gītā enjoins workers to perform their duties in a spirit of detachment, surrendering the results to God. Then alone does a work, or karma, become dharma and purify the mind by removing the illusory notion of duality. The man of pure mind sees the blissful Brahman within, without, and everywhere. His fear and expectation give place to an inner calmness and self-assurance, his longing and restlessness to unruffled peace. More and more he becomes engrossed in the contemplation of Reality. If his mind is diverted outward by any lingering desire for work, he is admonished by an inner voice: "Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead." (Bible: *Matthew* 8:22) "Ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always." (*Matthew* 26:11) Such a person may not fit into any scheme of social service or patriotic endeavour; he may

not be utilized to promote worldly culture; yet he is the salt of the earth.

Such a person also desists from ritualistic action—which is, in general, the meaning of the action denounced by Śankara in his commentary on the Gītā—in order to secure happiness in heaven, as promised by religion. Discovering the Self to be the abode of real happiness, he renounces all the illusory happiness of the relative world. That is why the organized religions often disapprove his conduct and denounce him as a rebel.

Thus, when the mind and senses are completely withdrawn from the outside world and freed from all desires, and when they are directed to the Eternal Reality, there comes the Great Revelation, the Knowledge of Truth, which destroys the ignorance and delusion of the relative world. The dreamer wakens from sleep and enters a world of a new dimension. The timid and hesitant fledgling jumps from the nest into the crisp autumn air and flies toward the dome of heaven. It is a new life with its own beauty and grandeur. The old slough is discarded; there is no more return to the world of ignorance. The Gītā often declares that a man of Self-knowledge is not born again. This birth refers to birth in ignorance as a slave of māyā. To this birth the illumined man does not return. But by no means can he be said to be annihilated: he has become one with Sat, Existence Itself. By transcending the relative life, which is the same as death, he regains Everlasting Life.

The physical body may not survive the impact of such realization. Very often it falls off like a dry leaf. The body, in this case, is immaterial. It has served its purpose: through its help the bound soul has regained its freedom. After the image is made, it matters little whether the mould be kept or thrown

away. But if the body survives—as is the case with Divine Incarnations and other souls born with a special mission for humanity—the seer by no means remains inactive. He engages in an intense type of activity notwithstanding his apparent calmness. Through his every thought and every action he devotes himself to the welfare of the world. Any personal motive behind his work, either for worldly enjoyment or spiritual felicity, is out of the question. Even while engaged in the most intense action, he finds that the Self is immersed in peace and blessedness and that it is only the senses and their objects that busy themselves in the world. (III, 28; V, 8-9) The ego, the notion of being a doer, is totally absent; it has been either burnt in the Knowledge of Brahman or melted in the love of God. The life of an illumined person is a perfect example of dedication and unselfishness. Truly unselfish action is not possible without the Knowledge of Self. True dedication is impossible without the Knowledge of God. Whatever he may do or however he may comport himself, the man of Self-knowledge sees Brahman in all the phases and accessories of action. "To him Brahman is the offering and Brahman is the oblation, and it is Brahman who offers the oblation in the fire of Brahman. Brahman alone is attained by him who thus sees Brahman in action."

When a man does not identify himself with the body, when he has known the Supreme Self, and when all notions of multiplicity have dropped away from him, he experiences total communion with the Absolute in every action he undertakes. Such a man, in the expressive words of Sri Ramakrishna, works "keeping in his pocket the Knowledge of Non-duality."

As a pitcher immersed in water is filled with water inside and surrounded with water outside, above and below and on every hand, so also the man endowed

with Knowledge is filled with God-consciousness inside and surrounded with it outside, above and below and on every hand. Again, as an empty pitcher suspended in the air has nothing within or without, above or below or on any hand, so also the man devoid of worldliness has nothing within or without, above or below or on any hand. As the flying bird leaves no footprint in the air, and the swimming fish no track in the water, so also the knower of Truth leaves no track or footprint on earth. He is known only to himself and to those who have attained Self-knowledge.

THE STORY OF THE MAHĀBHĀRAṬA

The *Mahābhārata* is one of the two great epics of India. The other is the *Rāmāyana*, which deals with the life and exploits of Rāma, regarded by the Hindus as an Incarnation of God. The *Mahābhārata* contains the story of the great descendants of Bharata, the son of Dushyanta and Śakuntalā. The scene of the epic is northern India. The *Mahābhārata*, more than any other book, has influenced the lives of the millions of Hindus for the last two thousand years. It is still read with unabated zeal by Hindu men and women all over the country. In the course of time, more and more matter has been added to the original book, until it has assumed its present huge form containing about a hundred thousand couplets. The book contains all sorts of tales, legends, myths, philosophical discussions, and scraps of history. It is a mine of knowledge, secular and spiritual. But throughout the endless chapters and many digressions runs the old, original story—the fratricidal war between the two branches of a royal kshatriya family.

In ancient times, long before the Christian era, there lived in India two royal families of cousins, known as the Kauravas and the Pāndavas. The Kauravas were the sons of Dhritarāshtra, and the Pāndavas of his brother Pāndu. The former was the elder, but being blind from birth, he was debarred from the throne in accordance with Āryan law; whereupon Pāndu became the ruler of the ancestral kingdom, which comprised a great part of northern India.

Pāndu had two wives, Kunti and Mādri. By the first he had three sons: Yudhishthira, Bhima, and Arjuna; and by the second he had twins: Nakula and Sahadeva. Dhritarāshtra's queen, Gāndhāri, a prin-

cess of Gāndhāra, the modern Kāndāhār in Afghanistan, bore him one hundred sons. At the time of her marriage, when she had learnt of her husband's blindness, she had bandaged her own eyes with many layers of cloth, and taken a vow not to remove the bandage as long as he lived, so that she might not enjoy the light that was denied to him.

Pāndu died a premature death, and his five young children were placed under the loving care of their blind uncle. Their education was supervised by Bhishma, affectionately addressed by all as the "grandsire."

Bhishma is one of the noblest characters of the *Mahābhārata,* the personification of statesmanship, wisdom, and knightly valour, all crowned by the example of utter selflessness. He was a prince in his own right. When Bhishma was very young, his father had fallen in love with a beautiful maiden belonging to a low caste. But the maiden's father, a very proud and sensitive man, forbade her marriage to the king except on certain conditions. He knew that Bhishma would inherit the kingdom after the king's death; so one of the conditions of the marriage was that Bhishma must for ever give up his claim to the throne. And to this was added another, a rigorous vow to be taken by Bhishma to remain unmarried as long as he lived, so that any future offspring of the maiden should have no rival for the throne. The king hesitated to ask his son to sacrifice all his future happiness; but Bhishma of his own accord went to his father and vowed to relinquish his claim to the throne and remain a life-long celibate. Deeply touched by his son's nobility, the king blessed him with a boon, namely, that death should never snuff out his life without first obtaining Bhishma's consent. The king married the beautiful maiden and a son was born to them. Many years later

Bhishma won two lovely princesses in a joust of arms. They became wives of his half-brother and the mothers of Dhritarāshtra and Pāndu. Bhishma was an ideal knight errant of his time, always lending his services for the cause of righteousness, giving wise counsel to kings, crowning them, and protecting them from enemies abroad and anarchy within. So unyielding did he remain in his vows that even now an inflexible vow in India is often called "Bhishma's vow."

Bhishma took charge of training the children of Pāndu and Dhritarāshtra. The brāhmin archer Drona was appointed as their military teacher. Yudhishthira, the eldest of all, was marked as the future king. The cousins received impartial treatment from the elders and grew up side by side. As time went on, their latent tendencies began to manifest themselves. Yudhishthira was found to be endowed with gentleness, piety, righteousness, and, especially, an undeviating regard for truth, and such other qualities as befit the ruler of a kingdom. Great physical courage and an almost superhuman strength were Bhima's special traits; and with them he exhibited bluntness, recklessness, and utter disregard for personal comfort. Arjuna was the pattern of the chivalric ideal of his time. Devotion to duty, proficiency in archery, indomitable courage, remarkable self-control, tenderness of feeling, generosity to the weak, loyalty to friends, and other knightly qualities, marked him as a born leader of men. All the five brothers cultivated a keen sense of manliness, princely deportment, respect for sacred things, and nobility of character.

In striking contrast stood Duryodhana, the eldest son of Dhritarāshtra. Undoubtedly he was loyal to his friends and efficient in the military arts; but he was cruel, malicious, deceitful, and selfish. Even as a boy he had become aware that Yudhishthira was an

obstacle in his way to the throne and that Bhima and Arjuna were more than his match in physical strength. Once he poisoned Bhima in an attempt to remove him from his path.

Soon Yudhishthira was publicly declared the heir apparent, and the event was solemnized with appropriate ceremonies. He began to discharge many important functions of state with the counsel of Bhishma, Drona, and the other elders. He endeared himself to all by his patience, forbearance, uprightness, and benevolence.

But all this only served to inflame the jealousy of Duryodhana, who was ever on the lookout for a means of destroying him and his brothers. Dhritarāshtra no doubt tried his utmost to treat alike his own children and his nephews, but he did not altogether succeed in keeping under control a special affection for his eldest son. Thus many a time Duryodhana wrung from his father grudging consent to things that might harm or destroy his five cousins. With the connivance of the blind father he succeeded in trapping the five brothers and their mother in a house built of lac and other inflammable materials. But through the timely warning of a well-wisher they escaped being burnt alive. They left the house through a subterranean passage and, to ensure their safety, disguised themselves as brāhmin beggars and went into hiding.

At that time it was proclaimed that the princess Draupadi, a noted beauty of northern India, would celebrate her svayamvarā, or bridal-choice ceremony. The kings, princes, and knights of the land responded to the invitation of her father, King Draupada, and assembled in his capital, each cherishing the desire to win the noble lady in the tournament. The Pāndava brothers, too, attended the festival in their brāhmin

guise. The winning of the bride was to be decided by shooting at a difficult target, the eye of a fish hung in the air. Five arrows must pass in succession through a swiftly revolving wheel before striking the target, and the archer must aim at the fish by looking down in a dish of water in which it was reflected.

Duryodhana, who was present with his friends, stepped forward. But he failed to pierce the target and was jeered by the crowd. The same fate met the efforts of the other princes. At last Arjuna came forward. Everyone tittered at what appeared an unseemly greed on the part of a brāhmin beggar. But, to the surprise of all, he pierced the eye of the fish, thus fulfilling the condition of winning Draupadi's hand.

At the festival were Krishna and Balarāma, two brothers related to Draupadi. They were also distant cousins of the Pāndava brothers. The sharp eye of Krishna did not fail to recognize them in their disguise. He and Balarāma followed them and Draupadi to the hut where Mother Kunti was eagerly awaiting the arrival of her sons with their daily alms. That day they were unusually late and she was worried. At last she heard their footsteps in the dark and was greeted by them in rather hilarious fashion. Even before being apprized of their day's earning, she asked them to share it among themselves. The five brothers decided to marry Draupadi. Krishna gave them His blessing.

Krishna, in whose veins flowed royal blood, was born in the clan of the Vrishnis. His father, Vasudeva, was a nobleman in the court of Kamśa, to whose sister, Devaki, he was married. Kamśa, the king of Mathurā, was a great tyrant. He was cruelty and unrighteousness personified. After the wedding of his sister, as he was driving her and his brother-in-law

to Vasudeva's palace, he heard a voice from heaven saying, "The eighth child of this couple, O tyrant, will be a boy and your slayer." The king, enraged, drove back with Vasudeva and Devaki, and imprisoned them in a dungeon of his palace. They were heavily shackled and their prison was watched day and night by armed sentries. In course of time were born to them seven children, who, with the exception of one, were killed by the vicious Kamśa. The one child, Balarāma, was secretly carried away, and the king was informed that he was dead.

Now the time arrived for the great event, and Vasudeva and Devaki expectantly awaited the birth of the Saviour, the Deliverer of the people from the oppression of the tyrant. Kamśa himself saw many omens of his oncoming doom and doubled the sentries about the prison-house. It was a stormy night. Blinding rain and a violent storm raged outside. Now and then lightning illumined the dark sky. At midnight Devaki gave birth to a boy, and from all the miracles that happened at the time, it became apparent to the joyous parents that the child was none other than Vishnu, the Supreme Lord, born to relieve the earth of sin and unrighteousness. Soon, however, the veil of māyā clouded their vision, and the Saviour appeared to them as their own babe. As they remembered the fate of the other children, their hearts were filled with unspeakable sadness, when they heard a voice saying, "Take the child to the house of Nanda, in the village of Gokul, and bring here the girl who has just been born to him."

Overpowered by an irresistible impulse, Vasudeva resolved to act according to the revelation. When lo, the chains fell from his hands and feet, the bolts slipped back, the heavy doors swung open, and the watchful sentries suddenly fell into a deep slumber.

The bewildered father took the child in his arms and went forth from the dungeon. The darkness parted before him; the rain offered no obstacle; and he came to the river Jamunā, across which lay Gokul, the village of the cowherds. Safely he forded the river and arrived at Nanda's house. A light was burning in a room, and Vasudeva saw Yaśodā, Nanda's wife, in deep sleep, with the newly born girl by her side. The children were exchanged and Vasudeva hurried back with the girl to the prison. Then instantly, as if by magic, the doors closed again, the irons shackled his limbs, and the watchman resumed guard of the dungeon with fixed arms.

In the morning the people of Gokul were pleasantly surprised to discover that it was a boy, and not a girl, that had been born to their beloved chieftain. Nanda and Yaśodā, though puzzled, accepted the child as their own and named Him Krishna, the Dark One; for His complexion was deep blue, like a dark rain-cloud, or like the tamāla tree, or like the dark waters of the Jamunā.

Kamśa came to learn of the birth of a child to his sister. He hurried to the prison, determined to kill it with his own hands. The tyrant found that it was only a girl, but remembering the prophecy, seized her. The babe miraculously slipped from his hands and, ascending into the sky, declared mockingly, "He who shall slay you, O wicked man, is even now growing up in the village of Gokul on the other side of the Jamunā."

Kamśa's heart was filled with fear. He seethed with rage to see how he had been outwitted by the gods. With the counsel of his vicious ministers, the king ordered the slaughter of all the babies of Mathurā and its neighbourhood. Himself an incarnation of evil, he had in his employ many evil creatures whose cruelty

stopped at nothing and who, it is said, could, like magicians, assume diverse forms to fulfil their diabolical purpose. Some of these emissaries came to Gokul to trap the child Krishna; but they were all annihilated by Him in what seemed a playful mood. The villagers discovered, to their great delight and surprise, that the powerful demons were no match for Him.

Krishna began to grow into a mischievous child. His charm was simply irresistible. The villagers never tired of watching Him. But His roguery was also without limit. The little pest would stealthily enter the homes of the cowherds and steal their cream, butter, and milk, and then entertain with all these His friends and His pet monkeys and birds. Though this sweet mischief delighted the hearts of the cowherd girls, still they were anxious lest he should grow into a thief. One day they complained to His mother, and she determined to punish the culprit. She procured a cord to bind Him, but found it was not long enough. She added more and more cord, but again and again found it insufficient to bind Krishna. All at once she discovered that she was trying to bind with an ordinary cord the all-pervading and omnipresent Lord, who can be bound only with the cord of His devotees' love. She was dumbfounded and stood with folded hands before the Universal Form of Krishna. Soon the vision passed and the Child laughingly submitted to her chastisement. Her heart overflowed with motherly love and she dismissed the miracle as mere fancy.

Another day Krishna, in a playful mood, ate some earth. His angry mother made Him open His mouth, and saw there the whole universe, with the heavens, the earth, and the nether world. As she recoiled from

this wondrous sight, Krishna laughed and resumed His natural form.

And so the seasons passed. When Krishna was seven or eight years old, Nanda and his cowherd friends moved to the forests of Vrindāvan. Balarāma and Krishna accompanied them and were allowed to go with the other lads to the pastures to tend the herds.

These were delightful years that Krishna spent with the herd-boys and herd-girls of Gokul and Vrindāvan in the forests and pastures and along the bank of the Jamunā. He was particularly fond of the herd-girls, called gopis. He was their playfellow and special pet. Their mutual love was deep and intense, but singularly free from any worldly stain. Their love-episodes in the woods and dales and meadows of Vrindāvan are still cherished by millions of Hindus and form an important part of India's mystical literature.

One of Krishna's favourite pastimes was to play His flute. The music would draw the gopis to the forest from their hearths and homes. To the Hindus Krishna's flute-note signifies the call of the Absolute, God's summons to men to leave behind their earthly ties and attachments. Under the blossom-laden trees, and with the south wind blowing gently, Krishna and His friends would put up swings and play all day long. Sometimes the girls would form a ring around a great tree and try to capture Krishna as He went darting in and out under their arched arms. Even the beasts of the herd had for Him a special love, and the cows would gaze at Him or low happily when He caressed them. No eyes ever had enough of the exquisite beauty of Krishna, the dark-blue form clad in a yellow robe, a garland of wild flowers hanging from His neck, and a peacock feather adorning His crest.

Krishna's favourite spot was a kadamba tree on the bank of the Jamunā. Perched on a high branch, He would play His magic flute, and the spellbound girls would rush from home, the river would cease to flow, and nature would be hushed in silence. The joy of the gopis and Krishna would reach its climax in the vernal season on the night of the full moon, when the mango blossom filled the air with its fragrance, red flowers covered the aśoka tree, and the long, delicate buds of the leaf-almond were about to burst into tender green. All would play and swing and dance in a rhapsody of joy; the touch of Krishna would transport their minds far away from the dual world and plunge them in divine ecstasy. Immediately they would experience God, the Embodiment of love and beauty.

The chief among the gopis was Rādhikā, called Rādhā for short, who realized in the companionship of Krishna the most intense sweetness. Her sorrow at her separation from Him was excruciating, but the yearning and longing of her heart reunited her with her Beloved, filling her mind with delight. To the Hindus, Rādhikā's ardent desire typifies the passionate love of the human soul for the ineffable Divine Spirit.

When Krishna was twelve years old, all the attempts of Kamśa to destroy Him having failed, the vile king tried a ruse to bring his nephew to Mathurā in order to destroy Him. He arranged a royal sacrifice to be celebrated with appropriate games and feats of strength. Invitations to attend the festival were sent to Krishna and Balarāma, and they accepted.

The chief event on the program was a tournament. The galleries and seats were occupied by the nobles, officers, invited guests, holy men, humble folk, and the cowherd boys and girls of Mathurā and Vrindāvan. They sat according to their social position, and Kamśa,

seated on his high throne in the middle, dominated the whole scene.

Krishna entered the arena accompanied by Balarāma, both attired according to their true rank, like noblemen to be presented to the court. They were very handsome and all eyes were fixed on them. And how various were the emotions evoked at that moment by the sight of Krishna! The mighty wrestlers saw in Him a death-dealing thunderbolt. Women saw the god of love. The sages saw the Supreme Lord. The common people saw simply a great man. Nanda and his friends saw the beloved Cowherd of Vrindāvan. Vasudeva and Devaki saw their loving child, born on a stormy night twelve long years before. And Kamśa trembled on his seat to see before him his own inescapable doom.

After the first flurry of excitement, the chief of the court wrestlers came forward and challenged Krishna and Balarāma to a mock contest for the entertainment of the spectators. But the bout was only a pretext; for the wrestler had been instructed to kill Krishna at an appropriate moment. Krishna discovered the trap. He manifested superhuman strength and killed the court wrestler as if in mere play. Whereupon Kamśa sprang to his feet and fell upon Krishna. In the twinkling of an eye Kamśa lay dead on the ground.

As the whole assembly was quaking with consternation at the death of the mighty Kamśa, Krishna and Balarāma walked calmly to their parents and reverently saluted them. Devaki and Vasudeva saw in Krishna the Lord Himself and began to worship Him. But the inscrutable māyā covered their eyes with a veil, and they were overjoyed to be united with Krishna and Balarāma, whom they had not seen since their births.

Krishna never returned to Vrindāvan. He felt the call of a new mission. The complex national life of India summoned Him to new activities. After slaying Kamśa He gave the kingdom to Kamśa's father, Ugrasena. Soon after, He founded the city of Dwārakā, on the sea-coast of Gujrat, and placed it, with the surrounding kingdom, in the hands of His kinsmen, the Vrishnis.

From now on He dwelt in palaces of kings and princes. The sweet episode of Vrindāvan was tucked away in a niche of His mind as a pleasant dream. He promised the heartbroken and wailing gopis that He would reveal Himself in their hearts whenever they longed to see Him; but it would be only a revelation of His Spirit-form.

Though Krishna became the adviser of kings and princes in matters of diplomacy, war, and statecraft, He occupied no throne Himself. He would create or conquer kingdoms but then give them over to others. Everybody noticed that, though intensely busy with the affairs of the world, He never identified Himself with any action. He was always a detached witness of events. He showed utter impassivity in the midst of a whirlwind of activity. On the highways of the world He moved, taking interest in every event, great or small, yet was never stained by worldliness. Though His hands and feet were ever busy in the world, yet His mind seemed to be fastened upon something not of this world. He looked on the world and its movement as a dream unfolding at the bidding of a Higher Will and regarded Himself as a mere spectator. Even while mingling with kings, He never actually interfered with their work. He did not impose His will upon others. His very presence would reveal what was right and what was wrong, but He would leave it to the individual to decide what he should do.

Sometimes, at most, He would remove an obstacle so that the will of man might have unimpeded play. Thus He permitted events to take their own shape and strove always to aid the course of destiny, even though destiny might lead in the end to the self-destruction of all things.

Now, when Krishna had given the five Pāndava brothers His blessing on the occasion of their marriage to Draupadi, they, strengthened by their new friendship with the Divine Youth and the matrimonial alliance with King Draupada, at last came out of hiding. Dhritarāshtra was told of their reappearance and, at the insistence of Bhishma, agreed to give them half their kingdom, but stipulated that the other half should be set aside for his own sons. With the advice of Krishna and the indefatigable labours of his brothers, King Yudhishthira laid the foundations of his new capital at Indraprastha, adjacent to modern Delhi. The foundations of the city were so soundly constructed that even today, after ages, its walls are shown to visitors; and its site was so well chosen that India's imperial capital has ever since been either that city itself or a place near by.

The new kingdom was administered with remarkable efficiency. There was no misery in the kingdom; peace and prosperity were visible everywhere. Krishna became the close friend and adviser of the Pāndava brothers. He and Arjuna became almost inseparable companions. In all affairs of state Yudhishthira consulted Krishna.

Under the management of Krishna the coronation ceremony of Yudhishthira was celebrated with great pomp. India's kings and princes participated in it. The happy event came to a termination with the performance of the rājasuya sacrifice, in which many princes acknowledged the lordship of Yudhishthira.

King Duryodhana and his brothers attended the festival. He was smitten with jealousy at the splendour of the new kingdom and the honour shown to his royal cousin. He resolved to bring about the destruction of the Pāndavas and found an able accomplice in his uncle Śakuni. This man, sly as a fox, was a brother of Duryodhana's mother and a gambler very skilful with the dice.

King Yudhishthira, for all his noble qualities, had one weakness. He could not refuse a game of dice when challenged. It was to him a challenge to battle; true kshatriya knight that he was, he could never decline. Duryodhana, counselled by Śakuni, prevailed upon his blind father to invite Yudhishthira to a game of dice. Yudhishthira knew that he gambled badly; furthermore, as a game would approach its height, he would completely lose his head and bet wildly. Therefore he always tried to avoid outright challenges to play. This time, however, he was summoned by his elder, and his chivalrous nature could not refuse the invitation. He saw bad omens and felt certain premonitions regarding the outcome of the game. He declared as he set forth with his brothers and wife: "I think it is the call of fate. Who is man to fight against destiny?"

The Pāndava brothers and their wife were royally received by Duryodhana. Soon the fateful game began. King Dhritarâshtra, Bhishma, Drona, Karna, and the whole court, besides Duryodhana and his brothers, were the spectators. Yudhishthira was to play with Śakuni, and Duryodhana had promised to pay the stakes that the latter might lose. The dice were loaded. From the very beginning Yudhishthira began to lose and Śakuni to win. Yet each time he lost, the king shouted for higher stakes. Thus were lost his jewels and royal treasures, lost the wardrobes and precious

banners, lost the royal stables and chariots, and lost even the weapons with which he had fought on the battle-field, and finally his kingdom itself. The king was now nearly insane and beyond all reasoning. At a critical moment of the play he staked his brothers, himself, and their wife—and lost!

Duryodhana's jubilation knew no bounds. He ordered one of his brothers to bring the wife, Draupadi, to court. She was dragged there by the hair. She was informed that thenceforward she would be a slave of Duryodhana and must obey all his commands. To make her humiliation complete, an attempt was made to snatch away her clothes; but she called on Krishna, the Protector of His devotees in the hour of their shame, and behold! the scarf and veil that were snatched from her body were miraculously replaced, and the queen was not for a moment disrobed. The elders shuddered at this humiliation of womanhood. King Dhritarāshtra trembled with fear and begged Draupadi to ask of him three boons to allay her wrath.

For the first boon she asked the freedom of Yudhishthira, and for the second, the freedom of the four other brothers with all their weapons. When asked about the third boon, she flung back with pride and scorn: "Nay, I ask no more! The Pāndavas, being free, can right themselves—they need owe no man anything!"

The Pāndavas were now free to return to their own kingdom. But the wily Duryodhana, finding his purpose unaccomplished, persuaded the blind and weak king to invite Yudhishthira for another game of dice. Dhritarāshtra again sent an invitation to Yudhishthira, who could not refuse it, since to him it was a point of honour. This time the stake was that the loser should retire into the forest for twelve years, to lead the

austere life of a hermit, and pass the thirteenth year unrecognized in some city, or, if recognized, pass another twelve years in the forest as forfeit. The dice were thrown and Yudhishthira of course lost again.

The Pāndava brothers, with their wife, made ready to go into the forest. They took leave of the elders, who were sad to see them go. They saluted the blind king, who assured them, "If Duryodhana fails to discover your hiding-place, then, on the day that ends the thirteenth year, you will return to your home and your kingdom as free men and princes, precisely as when you came to this place to play dice."

Duryodhana showed his irritation at this uncalled-for generosity of his father; but the pledge had been given by the king and could not be taken back. The five brothers and Draupadi went into exile.

During their twelve years in the forest the Pāndavas lived as hermits. They practised austerities, mingled with holy men, and received from them spiritual enlightenment. The tedium of their wandering life was mitigated by the loyal devotion of Draupadi and the indissoluble bond of friendship among the brothers themselves. During this period Krishna and Arjuna spent a great deal of time together, discussing God, the soul, and the hereafter. The thirteenth year of their exile was spent in a city, where the five brothers worked as menials of King Virāta. This critical year passed without their being recognized.

When the period of exile was over, a delicate situation arose. For thirteen years Duryodhana had enjoyed unrivalled lordship of northern India. He had consolidated his position by forming alliances with many kings. He controlled the army and the treasury. And the five brothers were practically beggars when they returned from the forest. Naturally Duryodhana was loath to part with his ill-gotten power and pos-

sessions. The elders, however, wanted a peaceful settlement between the Pāndavas and the Kauravas. The restoration of their legitimate kingdom to the five sons of Pāndu was the minimum demand of justice. And Yudhishthira was willing to make peace on these terms, forgiving and forgetting all the insults inflicted by Duryodhana on him, his brothers, and their wife. Bhishma and Drona wholeheartedly supported this policy of reconciliation, and everyone emphasized the evils of a fratricidal war. Krishna, too, strongly urged Duryodhana to return to Yudhishthira his rightful kingdom. The plighted word of King Dhritarāshtra on the eve of the Pāndavas' departure was recalled. Duryodhana had no just claim in denying the Pāndavas their legitimate kingdom.

To all the requests of the elders and the wise, the wicked prince gave only one reply. In his opinion Yudhishthira had lost his kingdom in an honourable game as though he had lost it on the battle-field. The whole country now belonged to Duryodhana alone, and he was capable of defending it. In case he died on the battle-field, defending his own rights, he would go straightway to heaven. In his view the ancestral kingdom could be enjoyed either by the Pāndavas or by the Kauravas, but never by both. One party must live like beggars; both could not rule at the same time. To Krishna's repeated requests to concede half the kingdom, or five villages at the least, Duryodhana stubbornly replied that he would not relinquish even as much land as could be lifted on the point of a needle.

Nothing more could be said. War became inevitable. Destiny must be fulfilled. The wicked counsellors of Duryodhana were jubilant, for they were certain of the annihilation of the Pāndavas. The wise, however, had not the slightest doubt that in the end righteous-

ness would triumph; and they knew, too, which side was righteous.

The Pāndavas and the Kauravas appealed to their friends and relatives to support them in what each described as a just war. To this appeal in the name of knighthood all the kings and princes responded. Feverish preparations were in progress.

Krishna was the natural friend and ally of Arjuna; but Duryodhana, too, coveted His friendship. Both went to Krishna's palace to seek His help, and were told that He was asleep. Duryodhana entered the bedroom and sat on a high stool near Krishna's head. Arjuna followed and sat in a humble manner at Krishna's feet. They awaited His awakening from sleep. As Krishna opened His eyes, His glance fell on Arjuna. Duryodhana declared that he had entered the bedchamber first and therefore had the first claim on Krishna's friendship. Krishna said, with a smile, that He had seen Arjuna first. But He did not want to disappoint either of them and had in His mind two proposals. He could give to one party His own picked soldiers, tens of thousands in number, fully armed and equipped. To the other He could promise His own mere presence, being Himself unarmed and resolved not to fight. Under no condition, He said, would He handle a weapon in this war or take any active part in it. The rival cousins were asked to make their choice. He had foreseen that Duryodhana, blinded by greed and lust, would never seek the presence of the Divine Krishna. Arjuna, in a voice choked with emotion, asked for His presence near him as his unarmed charioteer, and Duryodhana, on his part, was delighted to avail himself of the service of His brave fighting-men. Asked by Krishna why he was satisfied with His useless presence, Arjuna said: "I know that You alone are able to kill all our enemies. But I my-

self want to destroy the forces of evil and earn the glory. So I accepted You and not your battalions. It is my desire that You remain always with me as my charioteer."

Yudhishthira could not easily reconcile himself to this war among brothers. But Krishna said to him: "I have tried My utmost to establish peace, but I have not succeeded. Duryodhana is under the power of unrighteousness. People will not blame you for this war; you are guiltless before God and dharma."

King Dhritarāshtra accepted the decision of his sons to fight as the unalterable decree of destiny. He saw that before God's will human power was futile.

Both Bhishma and Drona had been for many years in the service of King Dhritarāshtra. Karna, though a half-brother of the Pāndavas, had been the recipient of many favours from Duryodhana. Further, he bore a grudge against Arjuna, because the two were almost peers in the military arts. Thus, at the call of duty and honour, these three great warriors espoused the side of Duryodhana, though to the insight of Bhishma and Drona the outcome of the battle could not have remained hidden.

At last the fateful day arrived. Both sides assembled on the historic plain of Kurukshetra, hallowed from time out of mind by many religious sacrifices and selected again and again, in the subsequent history of India, as a battle-field for the control of the political destiny of the country. Bhishma became the generalissimo of Duryodhana, and Dhrishtadyumna commanded the Pāndava army. The military leaders, according to their rank and position, mounted chariots or elephants or horses. Each warrior waved his pennon carrying his own cognizance. Everyone was equipped with his own favourite weapon—a bow or a sword or a club—and each carried in his hand a conch-shell with which

he sounded the call to battle. The mighty armies drawn up against each other were like two vast oceans of human heads.

King Dhritarāshtra wanted to be informed of the events on the battle-field. The blind king was offered special sight by the sage Vyāsa; but he refused the boon, for he knew that the deaths of his near and dear ones would be more than he could bear. Therefore Sanjaya acted as his reporter. Since the battle-field was too vast for any mortal eye and too complex for any human mind, Sanjaya was given supernatural vision, by a boon of Vyāsa, to see and hear all that happened there.

It was indeed a wondrous sight. The best of India's manhood was there. Banners of various hues waved in the wind. The garments of the combatants were colourful and variegated. The sound of conchs and drums was like a tempest sweeping over the forests or a tidal-wave in the ocean. The trumpeting of elephants, the neighing of horses, the blare of trumpets and clash of cymbals, created a tumult too great for human ears. The warriors had staked their lives to win victory for their respective sides. And who were these warriors? In happier days they had been friends, comrades, and playfellows. Now confronted each other youths who were as brothers, and elders venerated by all for their age and wisdom.

As the combatants stood poised, Arjuna asked Krishna to drive his chariot into the space between the armies—a sort of no-man's-land. Casting his eyes around him, he saw assembled the very flower of India's knighthood, those to whom he was bound by a thousand ties of love, respect, and affection. He must wade through their blood in order to regain the kingdom. Eyes swimming in tears and voice faltering, he said to Krishna, his charioteer:

"O Krishna, at the sight of these my kinsmen, assembled here eager to give battle, my limbs fail and my mouth is parched. My body is shaken and my hair stands on end. The bow Gāndiva slips from my hand and my skin is on fire. I cannot hold myself steady; my mind seems to whirl. O Keśava, I see omens of evil.

"Nor do I perceive, O Krishna, any good in slaughtering my own people in battle. I desire neither victory nor empire nor even any pleasure. . . .

"These, O Madhusudana, I would not kill, though they should kill me, even for the sake of sovereignty over the three worlds—how much less for this earth!"

Arjuna enumerated to Krishna all the evils that befell society from war—perfect arguments used by pacifists even of modern times. He concluded:

"Far better would it be for me if the sons of Dhritarāshtra, weapons in hand, should slay me in the battle, unarmed and unresisting."

Krishna instantly perceived Arjuna's temporary confusion, which any mortal might feel when faced with such an overwhelming situation. The Pāndava warrior had forgotten where the path of duty lay. But Krishna, great psychologist that He was, knew it was no time for platitudes. The depressed soul must be lashed into action. Striking Arjuna at his most sensitive point, the honour of a kshatriya, Sri Krishna said:

"In this crisis, O Arjuna, whence comes such lowness of spirit, unbecoming to an Āryan, dishonourable, and an obstacle to the attaining of heaven?"

The real cause of Arjuna's confusion was his ignorance—his lack of discrimination between the Real and the unreal, Spirit and matter, Soul and body. Such darkness of ignorance can be removed only by the light of knowledge. Sri Krishna instructed Arjuna

about the nature of the Soul and the meaning of death:

"Even as the embodied Self passes, in this body, through the stages of childhood, youth, and old age, so does It pass into another body. Calm souls are not bewildered by this. . . .

"The unreal never is. The Real never ceases to be. The conclusion about these two is truly perceived by the seers of Truth.

"That by which all this is pervaded know to be imperishable. None can cause the destruction of that which is immutable.

"Only the bodies, of which this eternal, imperishable, incomprehensible Self is the indweller, are said to have an end. Fight, therefore, O Bhārata.

"He who looks on the Self as the slayer, and he who looks on the Self as the slain—neither of these apprehends aright. The Self slays not nor is slain.

"It is never born, nor does It ever die, nor, having once been, does It again cease to be. Unborn, eternal, permanent, and primeval, It is not slain when the body is slain. . . .

"Even as a person casts off worn-out clothes and puts on others that are new, so the embodied Self casts off worn-out bodies and enters into others that are new.

"Weapons cut It not; fire burns It not; water wets It not; the wind does not wither It."

Krishna explained to His royal disciple the meaning of action and non-action, the nature of the Godhead and Its manifestation, the different paths of liberation, and the way to the *summum bonum.*

Throughout the Bhagavad Gītā, Sri Krishna addresses Arjuna by different epithets, each one bearing a special meaning. The purpose of the Teacher is to remind Arjuna either of his royal lineage or noble

ancestry or physical might or great power of self-control or the like. Thus Krishna seeks to stir up noble feelings in the mind of His dejected disciple. Arjuna, too, while addressing Sri Krishna, uses different epithets associated with the spiritual nature of the Divine Teacher.

The setting of the magnificent dialogue could not have been more appropriate and sublime—a battle-field, where all are on the border-line between life and death and where one realizes the transitory nature even of the most cherished objects in the world. The moment could not have been more auspicious: Arjuna's mind was one-pointed, in view of the imminent crisis, and eager to know what lay beyond.

Even after three thousand years it is not difficult for a modern man to visualize Arjuna's chariot in that no-man's-land, his snow-white horses impatient to plunge into the fray, but restrained by the strong muscles of Krishna's arm so that they are drawn back almost on their haunches; Arjuna, drooping and dejected, in bewilderment of spirit, supplicating the Divine Teacher to show him the path of duty; and Sri Krishna, with the forefinger of His free hand raised, His face calm, His eyes full of compassion, and His lips parted in a faint smile.

The great Master, the embodiment of His own teaching, says:

"He who sees inaction in action, and action in inaction, he is wise among men, he is a yogi, and he has performed all action."

The Teacher goes on instructing Arjuna that the Lord alone is the Doer and the Master. All things, great and small, are done at His supreme command. Men are but instruments in His hands. It is futile to try to oppose His will. Life and death, good and evil, light and darkness, though opposed to each other on

the relative plane, are synthesized in the Reality of the Godhead. Things are accomplished first in the fore-ordaining mind of the Lord, and then men are used as His instruments to demonstrate their accomplishment in the outside world. The combatants on the battle-field of Kurukshetra have already been slain by the Lord to fulfil His divine purpose on earth; it is now Arjuna's duty, nay, his privilege, to be the Lord's instrument in the manifested world.

"Therefore stand up and win glory; conquer your enemies and enjoy an opulent kingdom. By Me and none other have they already been slain; be an instrument only, O Arjuna."

The instruction is accompanied by an unprecedented revelation—the vision of the Lord's Universal Form, embodying all created beings, all pairs of opposites, all events of the past, present, and future. Such a staggering sight, including everything in one sweeping vision, can be seen only through the Lord's grace.

Arjuna's hesitation melts away. He springs to his feet fearlessly, sounds the war-cry of the Pāndavas, and flings himself into the fortunes of battle; for when a man sees God, he feels strong to face the world and do his duty.

The dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna, and the revelation of the Godhead—what Krishna taught in a few moments and Arjuna saw in a flash—were expressed by the sage Vyāsa in seven hundred verses, entitled the Srimad Bhagavad Gītā, the Song of the Blessed One.

Then followed a terrible slaughter. No quarter was asked and none given. The heroes of both sides fell one by one. After eighteen days of unceasing battle Duryodhana was killed by Bhima's club. The war ended with the victory of the five brothers, although they too lost their friends, relatives, and children.

When the dead, once bejewelled kings and princes, lay mangled on the battle-field, covered with dust, there approached the procession of royal women of the Kurus, with Gāndhāri as their leader, to identify their husbands, children, and relatives. Their cries were lifted to the sky. They were accompanied by the Pāndava brothers and Sri Krishna. At the sight of her dead sons, one hundred in number, Gāndhāri's grief knew no bounds. Bitterly she cursed Krishna:

"Two armies, O Krishna, have been consumed. Whilst they thus put an end to one another, why were Thine eyes closed? Thou who couldst have done either well or ill, as pleased Thee—why hast Thou allowed this evil to come upon all? I shall now, in virtue of the truth and purity of womanhood, pronounce Thy doom. Thou, O Krishna, because of Thine indifference to the Kurus and the Pāndavas whilst they killed one another, shalt Thyself become the slayer of Thine own kinsmen. In the thirty-sixth year from now, O Krishna, having brought about the destruction of Thy sons and kindred, Thou shalt Thyself perish by woeful means, alone in the wilderness. And the women of Thy race, deprived of sons, kindred, and friends, shall weep in their desolation as do now these women on the battle-field of Kurukshetra!"

When she had finished her imprecations, Krishna said with a smile: "May all blessings fall upon you, O Gāndhāri, in thus aiding Me in the ending of My task. Verily are My people, the Vrishnis, incapable of defeat. Therefore must they needs die by the hands of one another. Behold, O Queen, I accept your curse."

"Arise, awake, O Gāndhāri," Krishna went on, "and set not your heart on grief. By indulging in sorrow man increases it twofold. Remember, O My daughter, that the brāhmin woman bears children for the practice of austerity, the cow brings forth offspring for

the bearing of burdens, the labouring woman adds, by child-bearing, to the ranks of the workers, but those of royal blood are destined from their birth to die in battle."

Queen Gāndhāri listened to these words in silence and realized that they were true. The great events happening before her very eyes had purified her mind, and she found that everything in the material universe is unreal. In this world there is a Will higher than man's, and it must be fulfilled. Through pleasure and pain, grief and sorrow, the Lord chastens man's spirit and helps him to attain illumination. She and Dhritarāshtra restrained their grief and, accompanied by the Pāndavas, went to the Ganges to perform the last rites for the dead.

King Yudhishthira ascended the throne and ruled his subjects for thirty-six years, justifying his appellation, the "embodiment of righteousness." The people had never been happier. His rule was based on dharma. Soon the country recovered from the ravages of war, and prosperity was seen on all sides. For the first fifteen years of his reign Yudhishthira regarded himself as the viceroy of Dhritarāshtra. Then the blind king withdrew into the forest, accompanied by Gāndhāri, and both lived as ascetics, absorbed till the last moment of their lives in contemplation of God.

Now the time arrived for the fulfilment of Gāndhāri's curse on Krishna and His relatives. A civil war broke out in Dwārakā. The members of the Vrishni clan fell upon one another and perished. Krishna looked on as a detached witness, seeing in all the fulfilment of destiny. He sent word to the Pāndavas to come to Dwārakā and take charge of the women and the old. Then He beheld Balarāma give up his body. Realizing that the time of His departure was near at hand, He restrained His mind and senses in yoga

and lay down on the bare earth under a tree. He was thus rapt in Self-communion when a hunter, seeing the red soles of His feet from a distance, thought that a deer lay crouching there and aimed an arrow, which struck the Lord in the heel. As the hunter drew near, he realized his mistake and was beside himself with grief. Krishna blessed him with a smile and soon thereafter gave up His body.

Arjuna arrived in Dwārakā but found complete desolation reigning in that once prosperous place. Mournfully he conducted thence the kinsmen of Krishna, the women and the old who had survived. On the road a band of warriors fell upon the miserable company and carried away a large number of the women. Arjuna could not muster strength to lift his mighty bow Gāndiva, with which he had slain many demons and powerful warriors. It became apparent to him that with the passing away of Krishna his own strength, too, had gone.

The five royal heroes now came to realize that the time of their end had arrived. They chose a grandson of Arjuna, Parikshit by name, as the successor to the throne, and set forth on their last solemn journey. Their aim was to climb the Himālayas and reach heaven. Queen Draupadi and a dog joined the procession. For their last act of royal grace, they circumambulated their kingdom and then proceeded toward the Himālayas. As they climbed the lofty mountains, peak by peak, Draupadi, the twins Nakula and Sahadeva, the mighty Arjuna, and Bhima, one by one, fainted, fell by the roadside, and died. But Yudhishthira did not flinch or look back or utter a groan or sigh. The faithful dog was by his side.

As he ascended the topmost peak, Indra, king of heaven, arrived with his chariot to escort the pious king to the celestial realm among the stars. After the

first greeting Yudhishthira inquired about his brothers and wife and was assured that they had preceded him to heaven. They could not go to heaven in their mortal bodies because each one had committed a sin while on earth. Thus assured, the king stepped aside to let the dog climb into the chariot first. But Indra objected. It was absurd that an unclean animal should enter the abode of the gods. He begged Yudhishthira to send the dog away. But the king refused to get into the chariot alone. His personal pride and honour were involved. The dog had been his loyal and devoted friend the whole course of the journey. Even while on earth the king had never failed to give shelter to one who sought it. The dog with wistful eyes looked on. No, even the happiness of heaven would be gall to him should he have to remember that he had cast away a true friend.

Yudhishthira stood at the portal of heaven, resolved not to enter it alone. And lo, in the twinkling of an eye, the dog was transformed into a shining deity, Dharma Himself, the god of righteousness. The king came through the final ordeal triumphant. As he walked into heaven he experienced, for a brief moment, a vision of hell in punishment for an equivocal sentence he had uttered, in a critical hour, on the battle-field of Kurukshetra. Then the pious king, first among mortals, entered heaven in a human body.

INTRODUCTION

By ŚANKARĀCHĀRYA

Om. *Nārāyana*[1] *is beyond the Unmanifest;*[2] *the Golden Egg*[3] *is produced from the Unmanifest. The earth*[4] *with its seven islands, and all other worlds, are in the Egg.*

The Lord created the earth and desired its continuance. With that aim He first created the Prajāpatis[5]*—Marichi and the rest—and taught them the dharma characterized by pravritti, or activity,*[6] *as described in the Vedas. He then created others—Sanaka, Sanandana, and the rest*[7]*—and taught them the dharma of nivritti, or renunciation, characterized by knowledge and dispassion.*

Of two kinds is the dharma dealt with in the Vedas: the one characterized by activity and the other by renunciation. This twofold dharma, the cause of the stability of the world order and also the direct means by which men attain prosperity and the Highest Good,[8] *was followed by members of the different castes—the brāhmin, kshatriya, and the rest—and of the dif-*

[1] An epithet of the Supreme Lord, on account of His lying on the waters (nārā) of the Great Cause before the beginning of a cycle.

[2] The first manifestation of the Absolute conditioned by māyā. In this state the names and forms of the relative universe are not evolved but remain in latent form, like the future tree in a seed.

[3] In this state of manifestation the five subtle elements of matter are evolved.

[4] The earth and other material objects consist of the five gross elements of matter, which are formed by a particular combination of the five subtle elements. See note on VII, 4.

[5] *Lit.*, lords of created beings.

[6] The purpose of which is the attainment of worldly well-being.

[7] From their very birth they were without desire or passion. They could not be persuaded to perpetuate the creation by begetting children.

[8] Liberation.

ferent āśramas,[9] *desirous to secure their welfare.*

People practised the Vedic dharma for a long time. Then lust arose among them; discrimination and wisdom declined. Unrighteousness began to outweigh righteousness. Thus, when unrighteousness prevailed in the world, Vishnu,[10] *the First Creator, also known as Nārāyana, wishing to ensure the continuance of the universe, incarnated Himself, in part,*[11] *as Krishna. He was born to Devaki and Vasudeva for the protection of the brāhmins on earth and their spiritual ideal. By the protection of the brāhmin ideal the dharma of the Vedas is preserved,*[12] *since all the different castes and āśramas are under its control.*

The Lord, the eternal Possessor of Knowledge, Sovereignty, Power, Strength, Energy, and Vigour, brings under His control māyā—belonging to Him[13] *as Vishnu—the primordial Nature, characterized by the three gunas. And then, through that māyā, He is seen* as though *born,* as though *endowed with a body, and* as though *showing compassion to men; for He is, in reality, unborn, unchanging, the Lord of all created beings, and by nature eternal, pure, illumined, and free.*

Though the Lord had no purpose of His own to serve, yet, with the sole desire of bestowing favour on men, He taught this twofold Vedic dharma to Arjuna, who was deeply sunk in the ocean of grief

[9] The āśramas denote the four stages of life, namely, the stage as a religious student practising austerity, the stage as a householder, the stage as a contemplative, when husband and wife retire from active life, and the stage as a sannyāsi, or monk.

[10] *Lit.*, the All-pervading Spirit; the Lord.

[11] In an illusory form created by His own will.

[12] The brāhmins explain the Vedas and officiate as priests in the sacrifices.

[13] Māyā cannot exist or act independently of Brahman. It is an inscrutable power inhering in Brahman. Though the Lord creates the universe with the help of māyā, yet He is not under its control. The ordinary living being is under the control of māyā.

and delusion; for a dharma spreads and grows when accepted by high-minded persons.

It is this dharma taught by the Lord that the omniscient and venerable Vyāsa, the compiler of the Vedas, embodied in seven hundred verses under the name of the Gītā.

This scripture, the Gītā, is a compendium of the essential teachings of the whole of the Vedas; its meaning is extremely difficult to grasp. Many commentators, desiring to present a clear idea of that meaning, have explained the words, and the meaning of the words and of the sentences, and also the arguments. But I find that, to people of ordinary understanding, these explanations convey diverse and contradictory meanings. Therefore I intend to write a brief commentary on the Gītā, with a view to determining precisely what it signifies.

The ultimate aim of the Gītā is, in a word, the attainment of the Highest Good, characterized by the complete cessation of relative existence and its cause. This is realized by means of that dharma whose essence is devotion to Self-knowledge attained through the renunciation of all action. With reference to this dharma laid down in the Gītā, the Lord says in the Anugītā:

"That dharma is quite sufficient for the Knowledge of Brahman." (Mahābhārata, *Chapter on the Aśvamedha, xvi, 12*)

In the same treatise it is said:

"He is without righteousness and without unrighteousness—he who is absorbed in the one Goal, silent, and without thinking."

"Knowledge is characterized by renunciation."

In the concluding chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā, Sri Krishna says to Arjuna:

"Abandon all dharmas and come to Me alone for shelter." (XVIII, 66)

The dharma characterized by activity and prescribed for the different castes and āśramas is, no doubt, a means of securing worldly welfare and also of attaining the regions of the gods; but when it is practised in a spirit of complete self-surrender to the Lord, and without desire for fruit, it leads to the purification of the mind. A man of pure mind becomes fit to acquire devotion to the path of knowledge and attains Knowledge. Thus, by means of the dharma of activity, one ultimately realizes the Highest Good. With this view in mind the Lord says in the Gītā:

"He who works without attachment, resigning his actions to Brahman." (V, 10)

"The yogis act, without attachment, for the purification of the heart." (V, 11)

The purpose[14] *of the twofold dharma described in the Gītā is the attainment of the Highest Good. The subject-matter of the treatise is Supreme Reality, known as Vāsudeva, the Ultimate Brahman. It expounds both in a special manner. Thus the Gītā treats of a specific subject, with a specific end in view, and there is a specific relation between the subject-matter and the object.*

Knowledge of the Gītā enables one to attain the goal of all human aspiration. Hence my attempt to explain its teachings.

[14] A Vedāntic treatise must contain, at the very outset, a statement of the following: the subject-matter of the book, its object or purpose, the relationship of the book to the subject-matter and the object, and the qualifications of those who may hope to study it. The subject-matter of the Gītā is Brahman, and the object is moksha, or liberation. It is related to the subject-matter as the exposition thereof and to the object as the means of attaining it. The four qualifications of the student are: discrimination between the Real and the unreal; renunciation of the unreal; cultivation of the six virtues, consisting of control of the senses and of the mind, forbearance, withdrawal of the mind from external objects, faith, and one-pointedness of the mind; and the desire for liberation.

MEDITATION

Om. *O Bhagavad Gītā, it was through Thy help that Nārāyana, the Lord Himself, brought enlightenment to Arjuna. Afterwards Vyāsa, a sage of ancient times, incorporated Thee in the* Mahābhārata. *O Goddess, through Thy eighteen chapters Thou showerest the immortal nectar of the wisdom of Non-duality and destroyest man's rebirth in this mortal world. O Mother, I meditate on Thee.*

I salute you, O Vyāsa, the possessor of great wisdom. Your beautiful eyes are large as the petals of a full-blown lotus. You have lighted the lamp of Knowledge, filling it with the oil of the Mahābhārata.

I salute Thee, O Krishna! Thou art the Wish-fulfilling Tree for those who take refuge at Thy feet. Thy one hand holds a staff for driving cows, and the other is raised—the thumb touching the tip of the forefinger—as imparting the Divine Knowledge. Thou art the Milker of the ambrosia of the Gītā.

The Upanishads are as a herd of cows; Krishna, the Son of a cowherd, is their Milker. Arjuna is the calf, the supreme ambrosia of the Gītā the milk, and the wise man the drinker.

I salute Thee, O Divine Krishna, Teacher of the universe! Thou art the Son of Vasudeva, the Giver of supreme delight to Mother Devaki, and the Destroyer of the demons Kamśa and Chānura.

With the help of Krishna the five sons of Pāndu emerged victorious from the battle of Kurukshetra. He acted as the Ferryman on the terrifying river of the battle-field, of which Bhishma and Drona formed the high banks, Jayadratha the water, the king of Gāndhāra the blue lotus, Śalya the shark, Kripa the

current, Karna the breakers, Áśvatthāmā and Vikarna the alligators, and Duryodhana the whirlpool.

May the impeccable lotus of the Mahābhārata, *which grows in the water of Vyāsa's words and destroys the sins of the Kaliyuga; of which the Gītā forms the irresistible fragrance, and many noble tales of heroes the stamens; which is enlightened by discourse on the Lord Hari; and on which light, seeking its nectar, a swarm of black bees, the joyous men of piety—may that* Mahābhārata *bestow on us the Highest Good!*

I salute Krishna, the Embodiment of Supreme Bliss, through whose grace the mute become eloquent and the lame scale mountains.

I salute the Shining One, whose praise is sung in diverse hymns by Brahmā, Varuna, Indra, Rudra, and the Maruts; whose glories are proclaimed by the bards in the verses and chapters of the Vedas; whom the yogis see when their minds are absorbed in contemplation; and whose limit is not known by the hosts of gods or demons.

Chapter One

ARJUNA'S GRIEF

1

Dhritarāshtra said: O Sanjaya, what did Pāndu's sons and mine do when, desirous to fight, they assembled on the sacred plain of Kurukshetra?

Pāndu—Younger brother of Dhritarāshtra, and father of the Pāndavas: Yudhishthira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva.

Mine—The hundred sons of Dhritarāshtra, of whom the eldest was King Duryodhana; the antagonists of the Pāndavas.

Sacred plain—Kurukshetra is sacred to the Hindus because here, from very ancient times, holy men have practised spiritual disciplines. In and around Kurukshetra lie battlefields where several times the fate of India has been decided and where, in obedience to their dharma, the kshatriyas unsheathed their swords to protect the spiritual culture of their motherland.

Dhritarāshtra was born blind; hence he inquires of Sanjaya concerning the progress of the battle.

2

Sanjaya said: On seeing the Pāndava army arrayed for battle, King Duryodhana went to his teacher and spoke these words:

Pāndava army—The army of Pāndu's sons.

Teacher—The military teacher of the royal children of Pāndu and Dhritarāshtra is a brāhmin named Drona. Drona knows that King Duryodhana upholds an unrighteous cause, yet fights for him in obedience to his duty to the reigning king.

3

O teacher, behold the great army of the sons of Pāndu arrayed by your talented disciple, the son of Drupada.

Dhristadyumna, the son of Drupada, is the official commander-in-chief of the Pāndavas. Drupada is the father-in-law of the Pāndava brothers.

4-6

In that army are mighty archers and heroes, in battle equal to Bhima and Arjuna: Yuyudhāna, Virāta, and Drupada, each a mahāratha;

Heroic Dhrishtaketu, Chekitāna, and the king of Kāśi; Purujit, Kuntibhoja, and Śaivya, all the best of men;

Powerful Yudhāmanyu, brave Uttamaujā, Subhadrā's son, and the sons of Draupadi—all mahārathas indeed.

Mahāratha—One able to fight single-handed ten thousand archers.

Draupadi—The wife of the five Pāndava brothers.

7

O best of the twice-born, let me also recount to you the leaders of my own army, those distinguished amongst ourselves. I shall name them, that you may know them all:

Twice-born—The word "dvija" refers to men belonging to the three higher castes among the Hindus, whose second birth is said to take place when they are initiated into spiritual life with the investiture of the sacred thread. Here the word denotes only the brāhmins.

8

Yourself and Bhishma and Karna; Kripa, who is

ever victorious in war; Aśvatthāmā, Vikarna, Jayadratha, and Somadatta's son;

Aśvatthāmā is Drona's son.

9

And many other heroes besides, armed with many weapons, each well skilled in battle, and all resolved to lay down their lives to serve my cause.

10

But this army of ours, protected by Bhishma, is inadequate, and that army of theirs, protected by Bhima, is adequate.

The verse is also interpreted to mean that the army under Bhishma is *unlimited*, whereas that under Bhima is *limited*.

Bhishma, the grandsire of the sons of Pāndu and of Dhritarāshtra, has impartial love for them all and wishes the welfare of both sides. But Bhima, the protector of the Pāndava army, naturally wants the victory of his side alone. He can be expected to show more zeal in winning the battle, whereas Bhishma, the protector of Duryodhana's army, is not especially eager to annihilate the opposing side. Hence Duryodhana's pessimistic note, as interpreted in the text. The army of Duryodhana exceeds, in actual numbers, the army of his opponents.

11

Now take your proper places in front of your marshalled troops and protect Bhishma alone.

No harm must befall Bhishma, the commander-in-chief, from the enemy.

12

Bhishma the grandsire, the courageous, the oldest of the Kurus, gave forth a lion-roar and blew his conch, causing joy to Duryodhana.

Lion-roar—A common expression in Sanskrit for a triumphant, confident, or exulting declaration.

Drona coldly receives the words of Duryodhana, and Bhishma wants to whip up the enthusiasm of his king and grandson. The blowing of the conch, indicating a challenge, opens the fight. Thus Duryodhana's side becomes the aggressor, responsible for the battle.

13

Then conchs and kettle-drums, tabors and trumpets and cow-horns suddenly blared forth; and the sound was stupendous.

The noise arises on Duryodhana's side.

14

Whereupon Mādhava and Pāndava, seated in their magnificent chariot yoked to white horses, also blew their celestial conchs.

Mādhava—A name of Krishna.
Pāndava—*Lit.*, son of Pāndu; the epithet here is applied to Arjuna.

Arjuna accepts the challenge of Duryodhana.

15

Hrishikeśa blew His conch, the Pānchajanya; Dhananjaya, the Devadatta; and Vrikodara, the doer of fearful deeds, blew his great conch, the Paundra.

Hrishikeśa—*Lit.*, the Lord, or Director, of the senses; a name of Krishna, the Godhead.
Dhananjaya—A name of Arjuna, given in honour of his having subdued the kings of India and acquired their wealth.
Vrikodara—*Lit.*, one having the belly of a wolf; a name of Bhima, given because of his enormous appetite

16

King Yudhishthira, the son of Kunti, blew his conch, the Anantavijaya; and Nakula and Sahadeva blew the Sughosha and the Manipushpaka.

17-18

The great archer, the king of Kāśi; the great warrior Sikhandi; Dhristadyumna and Virāta; the unconquered Sātyaki;

Drupada, and the sons of Draupadi, and the mighty son of Subhadrā, O Lord of the Earth, each blew his own conch.

Son of Subhadrā—Abhimanyu; Subhadrā is Arjuna's wife. Lord of the Earth—Dhritarāshtra.

19

And that tumult, resounding through heaven and earth, rent the hearts of Dhritarāshtra's followers.

Verses 14-19 contain several hints by Sanjaya regarding the superiority of the Pāndava army and the ultimate defeat of the sons of Dhritarāshtra.

20

Then, O Lord of the Earth, seeing Dhritarāshtra's army standing in battle array and the clash of arms about to begin, Arjuna, whose ensign bore the device of a monkey, spoke as follows to Krishna:

21-22

Arjuna said: O Achyuta, between the two armies draw up my chariot, that I may behold those who stand there eager to fight, and may know, on the eve of battle, with whom I must contend.

Achyuta—*Lit.*, the Changeless One; an epithet of Krishna.

23

I would observe those who are gathered here to fight, desiring on the field of battle the welfare of the evil-minded son of Dhritarāshtra.

24-25

Sanjaya said: O Bhārata, thus addressed by Guḍākeśa, Krishna drew up the excellent chariot between the two armies, facing Bhishma, Drona, and all the rulers of the earth, and said, "Behold, O Pārtha, all the Kurus here assembled!"

Bhārata—*Lit.*, a descendant of Bharata; here it refers to Dhritarāshtra.

Guḍākeśa—*Lit.*, one who has controlled sleep; an epithet of Arjuna.

Pārtha—*Lit.*, the son of Prithā; an epithet of Arjuna.

26

Then Pārtha saw, arrayed in both the armies, fathers and grandfathers, maternal uncles and brothers, sons and grandsons, comrades and friends, fathers-in-law and teachers.

Fathers—Uncles, revered as fathers.

The leaders of the two armies are first cousins; therefore Arjuna sees on both sides kinsmen and relatives united by bonds of blood and love.

27

Casting his eyes on all these kinsmen stationed on opposing sides, the son of Kunti was overcome with deep pity and sorrowfully spoke.

Kunti—Arjuna's mother.

28-30

Arjuna said: O Krishna, at the sight of these my kinsmen, assembled here eager to give battle, my limbs fail and my mouth is parched. My body is shaken and my hair stands on end. The bow Gāndiva slips from my hand and my skin is on fire. I cannot hold myself steady; my mind seems to whirl. O Keśava, I see omens of evil.

Gāndiva—The mighty bow of Arjuna.
Keśava—An epithet of Krishna.

31

Nor do I perceive, O Krishna, any good in slaughtering my own people in battle. I desire neither victory nor empire nor even any pleasure.

32-34

O Govinda, of what avail to us is empire, of what avail are enjoyments and even life itself? Our fathers and uncles, sons and grandsons, fathers-in-law and brothers-in-law, teachers and other relatives, for whose sake we desire kingdom, enjoyments, and pleasures, are arrayed here in battle, having staked their wealth and lives.

Govinda—An epithet of Krishna.

35

These, O Madhusudana, I would not kill, though they should kill me, even for the sake of sovereignty over the three worlds—how much less for this earth!

Madhusudana—*Lit.*, the Slayer of the demon Madhu; an epithet of Krishna.
Three worlds—Heaven, earth, and the nether world.

36

O Janārdana, what joy can be ours in killing these sons of Dhritarāshtra? Sin alone will possess us if we kill these felons.

Janārdana—*Lit.*, the Destroyer of the demon Jana, or, according to Śankara, He who is prayed to for prosperity and liberation; an epithet of Krishna.

Felons—The Sanskrit word describes one who sets fire to the house of another person or poisons him or falls on him, sword in hand, to kill him or steals his wealth, land, or wife. According to law, such a criminal can be killed with impunity. The sons of Dhritarāshtra are guilty of all these crimes; but Arjuna's argument is based on the injunction of the higher religion, according to which killing of any kind is sinful.

37

Therefore we ought not to kill our kinsmen, the sons of Dhritarāshtra; for, O Mādhava, how can we ever be happy by killing our own people?

38-39

Though they, their understanding overcome by greed, perceive no evil in the decay of families and no sin in hostility to friends, why, O Janārdana, should not we, who clearly perceive the evil in the decay of families, learn to refrain from this sin?

They—Duryodhana and his friends.

Decay of families—The inevitable result of a civil war.

40

With the decay of a family, perish its dharmas, which have existed from time out of mind. With the ending of the dharmas, adharma overwhelms the whole family.

Dharmas—Duties, rites, and ceremonies practised by the family in accordance with religious injunctions.

Perish its dharmas—Owing to the death of the elders, who are the custodians, instructors, and transmitters of the religious traditions of the family.

Adharma—The opposite of dharma; impiety and unrighteousness.

41

When adharma overwhelms the family, O Krishna, the women of the family become corrupt; and when, O Krishna, the women are corrupt, there arises a mixing of castes.

Become corrupt—As a result of an internecine war the number of men is depleted. In civilized societies men generally act as guardians of the weaker sex.

Mixing of castes—One of the evil consequences of the depletion of the number of men in society is that the women break the caste rules and traditions as regards marriage. Marriage outside one's caste is considered irregular by the Hindu law-givers.

42

This mixture leads into hell the family itself as well as those who destroy it; for their ancestors fall, deprived of the offerings of rice-balls and water.

Rice-balls and water—The reference is to the Hindu religious rites for the dead, known as the śrāddha ceremony, in which rice-balls and water are offered by the eldest son for the satisfaction of the soul of the deceased. This ceremony cannot be performed by children born of irregular marriages, that is to say, marriages in which husband and wife belong to different castes. Deprived of the rice-balls and water, the soul of the deceased, according to Hindu tradition, goes to hell. The offering of rice-balls and water is a symbol of loving and reverent thoughts for the dead, which help to foster a feeling of close relationship between the living and their forebears.

According to the Hindu religious injunctions a son serves two purposes. First, he assures the continuity of the family; and second, he preserves the family tradition through his reverence for the ancestors. These purposes are served only through legitimate children. When women become corrupt, illegitimacy increases.

43

By these evil deeds of the destroyers of families, which result in the mixing of castes, the eternal dharmas of caste and family are uprooted.

44

We have heard it said, O Janārdana, that inevitably the men whose family dharmas are destroyed dwell in hell.

45

Alas, we are resolved to commit a great sin, in that we are ready to slay our kinsmen to satisfy our greed for the pleasure of a kingdom!

Kingdom—The reason for the battle of Kurukshetra is Duryodhana's refusal to give back to the Pāndava brothers their legitimate kingdom.

46

Far better would it be for me if the sons of Dhritarāshtra, weapons in hand, should slay me in the battle, unarmed and unresisting.

Arjuna has turned a complete pacifist and adopted the policy of non-resistance to evil. But this policy is wrong, inasmuch as if one sees evil one must resist it. The real attitude of non-violence follows from the perception of God in all beings. Only the man whose mind has gone beyond good and evil does not resist evil, for he does not see evil. Further, Arjuna is a kshatriya; hence it is his duty to fight in a righteous cause.

47

Sanjaya said: Arjuna, having spoken thus on the battlefield, cast aside his bow and arrow and sank down on his chariot-seat, his mind overcome with grief.

Thus in the Bhagavad Gītā, the Essence of the Upanishads, the Science of Brahman, the Scripture of Yoga, the Dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna, ends the First Chapter, entitled:

ARJUNA'S GRIEF

Chapter Two

THE WAY OF ULTIMATE REALITY

1

Sanjaya said: To Arjuna, who was thus overwhelmed with pity, and whose troubled eyes were filled with tears, Madhusudana spoke these words:

2

The Lord said: In this crisis, O Arjuna, whence comes such lowness of spirit, unbecoming to an Āryan, dishonourable, and an obstacle to the attaining of heaven?

Crisis—When the highest standard of chivalry, honour, and discrimination is demanded.

Unbecoming to an Āryan—Non-Āryans are generally insensitive to the finer feelings of righteousness and nobility.

Heaven—A life of well deserved happiness and enjoyment in heaven is a kshatriya's goal after death.

With words of biting reproach Krishna tries to rouse Arjuna's drooping spirits.

3

Do not yield to unmanliness, O son of Prithā. It does not become you. Shake off this base faint-heartedness and arise, O scorcher of enemies!

Unmanliness—Arjuna has covered his momentary weakness with a mask of religious feeling.

Scorcher—A well chosen word to remind Arjuna of his kshatriya heritage.

Krishna, great psychologist that He is, knows very well that soft expressions of sympathy do not invigorate a droop-

ing soul. Lashing words of strength are needed to rouse its forgotten manliness. Compare what the Lord said, under similar circumstances, to Job: "Gird up now thy loins like a man." (Bible: *Job* 38:3)

4

Arjuna said: But how, O Destroyer of Madhu, O Slayer of enemies, can I fight with arrows on the battle-field against Bhishma and Drona, who are worthy of my worship?

Bhishma and Drona are Arjuna's grandsire and teacher.

5

It would be better, indeed, to live on alms in this world rather than to slay these high-souled teachers. But if I kill them, even here I shall enjoy wealth and desires stained with their blood.

Even here—This world will be turned into hell.

6

We do not know which would be the better for us: that we should conquer them or they should conquer us. Arrayed against us stand the very sons of Dhritarāshtra, after slaying whom we should not wish to live.

That we should conquer—We should enjoy wealth and desires, but stained with blood, and our victory would be turned into a defeat.

They should conquer—We should then live on alms without slaying the enemy, and our defeat would be a triumph of spirituality.

7

Overpowered in the very essence of my being by this evil of commiseration, my mind confused about dharma, I supplicate You: tell me in sooth which is

the better. I am Your disciple. Instruct me, who have taken refuge in You.

Evil of commiseration—Commiseration is for Arjuna an evil because it has confused his judgement.

Dharma—*Lit.,* that which holds together. As such, it means the inmost constitution of a thing, the law of its inner being, which hastens its growth and without which it ceases to exist. The secondary meaning of the word is duty, religion, righteousness. The dharma of a man is not imposed from outside; it is acquired by him as a result of his actions in his past lives. Every action leaves behind a tendency or impression in the subconscious mind. A man's character is the sum-total of these tendencies. Death cannot destroy them. It is these tendencies that determine his dharma, or duty. In order to be true to himself he must act according to his dharma. Fighting in a just cause is the dharma of a kshatriya, while the same thing is a sin for a brāhmin, for it is contrary to the law of his being. To mould one's action according to the law of one's own being is therefore the dharma, the religion or way to liberation, of every individual. It acts as the wind that blows away the cloud of ignorance, created by man's past actions, which hides the sun of his divine heritage. Any action contrary to a man's dharma only makes the cloud thicker.

Disciple—Until the seeker acknowledges himself to be a disciple, the teacher may not impart the highest Knowledge.

8

Indeed, I see naught to destroy the grief that is drying up my very senses—even the attainment of unrivalled and flourishing dominion on earth and lordship over the gods in heaven.

9

Sanjaya said: Having spoken thus to Hrishikeśa, Arjuna, scorcher of foes, said to Govinda, "I will not fight," and fell silent.

10

O descendant of Bharata, to him grieving in the midst of the two armies Hrishikeśa, smiling, spoke these words:

Descendant of Bharata—Refers to Dhritarāshtra.

With the next verse begin the instructions of Krishna and the philosophy of the Gītā. Arjuna's grief is caused by delusion in the form of attachment to his kinsmen, friends, and so on. The delusion is based on the egotistic notion: "I am theirs and they are mine." Of his own accord he has come to the battle-field to fulfil his dharma, or duty, as a kshatriya: to fight in a righteous cause when all efforts at appeasement have failed. But under the influence of this inscrutable delusion he now wants to abstain from his proper duty and lead a mendicant's life. All people under the influence of delusion want to give up their own duties and assume those of others. Delusion, based on ego and attachment, is the cause of samsāra, the incessant round of birth and death in the relative world. Only by the Knowledge of Reality can it be destroyed. Krishna desires to teach the whole world this Knowledge through Arjuna.

Since Sri Krishna has discovered that the deep-seated delusion and grief of Arjuna cannot be removed without the knowledge of Reality, He immediately starts His discourse on the immortality of the Soul.

11

The Lord said: You have been mourning for those who should not be mourned for; yet you speak words of wisdom. Neither for the living nor for the dead do the wise grieve.

Should not be mourned for—Because they are eternal in their real nature.

Words of wisdom—A reference to Chapter I, 35-45.
Wise—They alone are wise who know the true nature of the Self.

The cause of Arjuna's grief is lack of discrimination between the body and the Soul.

Why do they deserve no grief? Because they are eternal.

12

Never was there a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor these kings of men. Never will there be a time hereafter when any of us shall cease to be.

Obviously Sri Krishna does not mean that our bodies, subject to birth and death, are eternal. As the Ātman, the Self, we exist in all three periods of time: past, present, and future.

That the Self is eternal is expounded by an illustration:

13

Even as the embodied Self passes, in this body, through the stages of childhood, youth, and old age, so does It pass into another body. Calm souls are not bewildered by this.

Embodied Self—The Soul assuming a physical body.
Calm souls—Their calmness is due to Self-knowledge.
This—Death.

The transition from childhood to youth is not marked by any change in the identity of the Soul. This is also true of the transitions to middle age, old age, and senility. The Soul remains unchanged through all the variations that take place in the body. Just so, the Soul passes unchanged into another body after death. Birth and death are spoken of with regard to the body and not the Soul.

It may be true that a man of Self-knowledge is not deluded by death; but how should ordinary people conduct themselves, people who believe in the happiness and suffering of the Soul due to contact with the pairs of opposites, such as heat and cold, pleasure and pain?

14

Notions of heat and cold, of pain and pleasure, arise, O son of Kunti, only from contact of the senses with their objects. They come and go; they are impermanent. Endure them, O Bhārata.

They come and go—As distinguished from the Permanent Self.

Endure them—Do not give yourself to joy or grief on their account. Do not give "self" - but perhaps enjoy or grieve - detached & equal in the objects of the senses?

The two epithets by which Arjuna is addressed point to his noble lineage on both his mother's and his father's side.

What good comes to him who endures heat and cold, and the like?

15

That calm man who remains unchanged in pain and pleasure, whom these cannot disturb, alone is able, O greatest of men, to attain immortality.

Calm—Sri Krishna is not speaking of the Stoic calmness, in which agitation of feeling is not outwardly expressed. The calmness of which He speaks is based on the knowledge of the Soul's immortality.

Remains unchanged etc.—Neither exults in pleasure nor feels dejected in pain.

Endurance, coupled with discrimination between the Real and the unreal, and detachment from worldly objects and pleasures, prepare the aspirant for right knowledge, which alone leads to liberation. Vedānta defines endurance as the

bearing of all afflictions without wishing to redress them, while being free from all anxiety or regret on their account.

An additional reason is given for abandoning grief and delusion:

16

The unreal never is. The Real never ceases to be. The conclusion about these two is truly perceived by the seers of Truth.

The determination of the nature of Reality is the quest of philosophy. The Real is that which is always the same, and the unreal is that which does not remain the same. The Real remains the same through past, present, and future. It always *is*. Any object conditioned by the law of cause and effect is not absolutely real; for every effect is a change brought about by a cause, and every cause is temporary.

The unreal never remains the same for two successive moments. The whole of the phenomenal world is unreal. ("Whatever did not exist in the past or will not exist in the future cannot really exist in the present."—Gauḍapāda) Names and forms, which constitute the phenomenal world, did not exist before the Soul came under the influence of ignorance; they will disappear with the destruction of ignorance. Like the objects seen in a dream, names and forms are perceived only when the Soul is overpowered by ignorance.

The only Reality is the Ātman, Consciousness, which is the unchanging Witness of the changes in the relative world. The Absolute Reality is not conditioned by causality.

What, then, is that which is always real?

17

That by which all this is pervaded know to be imperishable. None can cause the destruction of that which is immutable.

That—Brahman, or the unchangeable Consciousness. It is the Self of all.

All this—The world of names and forms.

Pervaded—Brahman is the Witness and the inmost Essence of the changeable world.

Cause the destruction etc.—For Brahman is without parts and is One without a second. Destruction of an object is caused by the loss of its parts, as in the case of the body, or by the loss of something belonging to it.

The immutable Consciousness, or Ātman, in the individual is the same as the all-pervading Consciousness, or Brahman, in the universe.

What is the unreal, whose nature is subject to change?

18

Only the bodies, of which this eternal, imperishable, incomprehensible Self is the indweller, are said to have an end. Fight, therefore, O Bhārata.

Eternal, imperishable—The physical body may be injured or destroyed by illness or death. The Self is subject to neither of these.

Incomprehensible—It is not comprehended by the senses, by the mind, or by any other instrument of knowledge. The Self is *svatah-siddha,* determined by Itself. Being the knowing Consciousness, It cannot be known by any other instrument. Everything else is known by the Self. The immediate and direct experience of "I am I" is the basis of all cognition. The statements of the scriptures regarding the Self do not serve the purpose of directly revealing Its true nature; they only eliminate all the attributes falsely superimposed upon It.

Fight—Krishna is not really commanding Arjuna to fight. Arjuna, following his dharma, had come to the battle-field determined to fight. He refused to fight on account of his ignorance about the true nature of the Soul. The Lord wants to remove this ignorance and leave him free to do what he, Arjuna, considers to be right.

That Bhishma, Drona, and the others are going to be killed by Arjuna is a false notion on his part.

19

He who looks on the Self as the slayer, and he who looks on the Self as the slain—neither of these apprehends aright. The Self slays not nor is slain.

The agent of slaying is the ego (aham) and the object of slaughter is the body; therefore the Self, which is different both from the ego and from the body, is neither the slayer nor the slain. For verses 19 and 20, compare *Katha Upanishad,* I, ii, 18-19.

Why is the Self immutable?

20

It is never born, nor does It ever die, nor, having once been, does It again cease to be. Unborn, eternal, permanent, and primeval, It is not slain when the body is slain.

This verse describes the absence of the six kinds of modification inherent in every living thing: birth, subsistence, growth, transformation, decay, and death. The Self is altogether changeless.

The proposition stated in verse 19 is that the Self is neither the agent nor the object of slaying; the reason for this, given in verse 20, is Its immutability. Now the proposition is concluded:

21

He who knows the Self to be indestructible, eternal, unborn, and immutable—how can that man, O son of Prithā, slay or cause another to slay?

By denying the act of slaying to the Soul, all actions are denied to It. An enlightened man, possessing Self-knowl-

edge, renounces all action associated with the idea of a doer, an instrument of action, and a result of action. The unenlightened man performs action in accordance with the scriptural injunctions in order to purify his mind. The pure mind alone knows the Truth.

The indestructibility of the Soul is expounded by an illustration:

22

Even as a person casts off worn-out clothes and puts on others that are new, so the embodied Self casts off worn-out bodies and enters into others that are new.

In the act of giving up the old body or entering into the new body, the real Self does not undergo any change whatsoever. According to Vedānta, Brahman, through Its inscrutable māyā, creates a body, identifies Itself with it, and regards Itself as an individual, or embodied, soul. Its purpose in assuming innumerable bodies is to rediscover ultimately Its transcendental nature. Through innumerable births in the relative world It gains experience, from experience It derives Knowledge, and through Knowledge It ultimately attains freedom. But during the state of self-forgetfulness the true nature of the Self never changes, just as the sun, though hidden by a cloud, never loses its splendour, or as the desert, in spite of the appearance of water in the mirage, remains always dry.

Why is the Self altogether changeless?

23

Weapons cut It not; fire burns It not; water wets It not; the wind does not wither It.

Weapons can destroy an object by cutting it into parts; but the Self is without parts and is therefore indestructible.

The same applies to the other methods of destruction. Only a material object consists of parts and is therefore destructible.

For this reason,

24

This Self cannot be cut nor burnt nor wetted nor withered. Eternal, all-pervading, unchanging, immovable, the Self is the same for ever.

Eternal—Because water, fire, wind, and all other agents of destruction cannot destroy the Self, which is infinite and hence without parts.

It is extremely difficult to understand the mystery of the Self. Therefore Sri Krishna describes It again and again, so that in some way or other Its nature may be grasped.

Furthermore,

25

This Self is said to be unmanifest, incomprehensible, and unchangeable. Therefore, knowing It to be so, you should not grieve.

Unmanifest—Inaccessible to the senses.

Incomprehensible—Inaccessible to the mind. The mind can think only about an object perceived by the senses. The Self, however, can be known by the pure mind, that is, by the mind totally free from greed, lust, and ego. The pure mind is the same as the Self.

Unchangeable—Because the Self is infinite. Being without parts, It cannot change.

Therefore Arjuna should not cherish the idea of the Self as slayer or slain and on that account grieve.

Assuming, for the sake of argument, that the Self is not eternal, Sri Krishna proceeds:

26

But if you think the Self repeatedly comes into being and dies, even then, O mighty one, you should not grieve for It.

Repeatedly comes into being etc.—According to the materialistic view, the Self is born with the body and dies with the body.

From the materialistic standpoint, grief for the Self is senseless, for Its birth and death are inevitable. Further, the Self, being impermanent, cannot have any hereafter and therefore cannot suffer from sin and hell.

27

For to that which is born, death is certain, and to that which is dead, birth is certain. Therefore you should not grieve over the unavoidable.

It is not proper to grieve for beings, which are mere combinations of cause and effect.

28

All beings are unmanifest in their beginning, O Bhārata, manifest in their middle state, and unmanifest again in their end. Why, then, lament for them?

All beings—As physical entities, which are mere combinations of material elements correlated as cause and effect.
Unmanifest—Non-perceptible.
Beginning—Before birth.
Middle state—After birth and before death.
End—After death.

Anything whose existence is not perceived in the beginning or end cannot be real, as is the case with magic or dreams. If

it is perceived in the middle, it is only an illusory perception, like a dream. Such a thing should not disturb one's mind.

29

Some look on the Self as a wonder; some speak of It as a wonder; some hear of It as a wonder; still others, though hearing, do not understand It at all.

Wonder—As an object unseen, strange, or suddenly perceived.

A man, on account of his ignorance, is unaware of his Self, the inmost Reality. Though the Self is of the nature of Spirit, yet It is confused with body, mind, sense-organs, relatives, and worldly possessions. Though changeless, It appears to change. Though of the nature of Light, illumining the mind and the senses, It remains hidden to man. Though one with Brahman, It appears to have a separate existence. Though always beyond time and space, It appears to be bound by them. Therefore the true nature of the Self is a great mystery. Wonderful seems to be the nature of the Self when described or taught by a teacher. True Knowledge makes a man realize that he is the Soul and has a body, not that he is the body and has a soul.

The verse may also be interpreted in this way: He who sees the Self is himself something of a wonder. He who hears and speaks of the Self is also a wonder; for among many thousands of men only one will be found endowed with Self-knowledge. Thus the Self is difficult to understand.

Sri Krishna concludes the topic:

30

The Self, which dwells in all bodies, can never be slain, O Bhārata. Wherefore you should not mourn for any creature.

The Self is immortal, though the body may be slain. Therefore grief on account of death is improper.

Grief is improper for other reasons besides those of Truth.

31

Considering, also, your own dharma, you should not waver; for to a kshatriya nothing is better than a righteous war.

Fighting is natural for Arjuna because he is a kshatriya. "Heroism, high spirit, firmness, resourcefulness, dauntlessness in battle, generosity, and sovereignty—these are the duties of a kshatriya, born of his own nature." (Gītā, XVIII, 43) But the kshatriya, before unsheathing his sword, must be convinced that the purpose of the war is to uphold law, justice, and righteousness.

Arjuna must not hesitate to accept the great boon that has presented itself to him unsought.

32

Happy indeed are the kshatriyas, O Pārtha, to whom comes such a war, offering itself unsought, opening the gate to heaven.

Unsought—Arjuna's enemies had precipitated the war by their own indiscretion.

According to the Hindu scriptures, a kshatriya who gives up his life in a righteous war goes to heaven.

Evil results will befall Arjuna if he refuses to fight.

33

But if you refuse to wage this righteous war, then, renouncing your own dhárma and honour, you will certainly incur sin.

34

People, too, will recount for ever your infamy. And

to a man who has been honoured, dishonour is worse than death.

With these stinging words Krishna seeks to stiffen Arjuna's spirit.

35

The great warriors will think you have withdrawn from the battle through fear; and you will go down in the esteem of those who have thought much of you.

Great warriors—Duryodhana and the others.

36

Your enemies will speak many a word that should not be uttered, scorning your prowess. Could anything be more bitter than that?

Referring to Arjuna's confusion, described in the sixth verse of the present chapter, the Lord says:

37

If you are killed in the battle, you will go to heaven; if you win, you will enjoy the earth. Therefore arise, O son of Kunti, resolved to fight.

Whatever may be the outcome of the war, Arjuna will be the gainer.

Arjuna will not incur any sin

38

Regarding alike pleasure and pain, gain and loss, success and defeat, prepare yourself for battle. Thus you will incur no sin.

Regarding alike pleasure and pain, etc.—Not being exalted by the one and depressed by the other.

It is desire for and attachment to the result of an action that create bondage; but when an action is performed without any such desire, it leads to freedom of the soul. The injunction to fight is only incidental.

The Lord explains Self-knowledge from the standpoint of karmayoga:

39

What has been declared to you is the wisdom of sāmkhya. Now listen to the wisdom of yoga, armed with which, O son of Prithā, you will break through the bonds of karma.

Sāmkhya—The true nature of the Absolute Reality. This wisdom refers to jnānayoga, the path of knowledge, which teaches discrimination between the Real and the unreal and urges renunciation of the unreal. The Knowledge of Reality directly destroys ignorance, which is the cause of birth and death in the relative world, and of the grief and delusion inevitably associated with it.

Yoga—Karmayoga, or the path of action. The follower of this path engages in action without any desire for or attachment to the result. He regards himself as an instrument of God. It is desire and attachment that create the subtle impressions in the mind which are the seeds of future action. Action performed without attachment or care for the result does not create new karma, but leaves the will free to devote itself to the achievement of Self-realization. Here is the secret of karmayoga.

Bonds of karma—Merit and demerit, virtue and sin, pain and pleasure, and the other pairs of opposites constitute the bondage of all action performed with a motive.

Sāmkhyayoga, or the path of knowledge, which directly reveals the true nature of the Self, is meant for very rare seekers, endowed with keen intellect for discrimination and undaunted will-power for renunciation. Other seekers must

first of all purify their minds through the disciplines of karmayoga; only then will they become fit to follow the path of knowledge. The pure in heart attain Self-knowledge through the grace of God. "Blessed are the pure in heart."

Arjuna can qualify for the highest Knowledge only through performance of his duty. Sri Krishna gives various arguments to persuade him of this. In verses 11-25 of the present chapter Sri Krishna speaks of the highest Knowledge as it is described in the Upanishads by the knowers of Brahman. In verses 26 and 27 He discourses from a purely materialistic standpoint. Verses 31-37 develop the attitude of a man of the world. In verse 39 and those that follow, Sri Krishna describes karmayoga, which is the special contribution of the Gītā to the philosophy of life.

The special merit of karmayoga:

40

In this no effort is ever lost and no harm is ever done. Even very little of this dharma saves a man from the Great Fear.

This—Karmayoga.

Ever lost—A religious rite or ceremony undertaken for a definite object, if left uncompleted, is wasted, like an incomplete house, which is neither serviceable nor enduring.

No harm—In the case of sickness the use of the wrong medicine may result in death. Likewise, certain forms of worship, if carelessly performed or left unfinished, produce positive loss instead of gain.

Dharma—Karmayoga.

Great Fear—Caused by the unending wheel of birth and death.

Karmayoga leads to the Highest Good.

41

In this, O scion of Kuru, there is only one resolute

and unwavering thought; but the thoughts of the irresolute are many-branched and unending.

In this—That is to say, in karmayoga, characterized by devotion to God and firm conviction that Self-realization will be achieved through His grace.

Thought—Self-realization. (devotion to God ?)

Irresolute—Those who perform action with a desire for results.

Those who crave results from their action are naturally assailed by many thoughts and are born in innumerable bodies. But those whose action consists in worship of God alone, and that also for His satisfaction, acquire the purity of mind and one-pointedness of aim that lead to Self-knowledge.

Selfish action motivated by a desire for enjoyment of happiness, such as is described in the ritualistic section of the Vedas, is condemned:

42-44

O Pārtha, no resolute and unwavering thought is formed in the minds of those who are deeply attached to pleasure and power; who allow their discrimination to be stolen away by the flowery words of the unwise; who permit their souls to be ridden with desires; who regard the attainment of heaven as the highest goal; and who take great delight in quoting the panegyric texts of the Vedas and declare that besides these there is nothing. These texts promise rebirths as the reward of their action and lay down specific rites for the attainment of pleasure and power.

Panegyric texts—The karmakānda, or ritualistic section, of the Vedas, which lays down specific rules for specific sacrifices and extols highly the results of these actions, namely, the enjoyment of pleasures in heaven.

Nothing—They ignore the philosophical section of the Vedas leading to liberation.

Rebirths—On earth, for the enjoyment of more pleasure and power.

All religions promise the beginners great power and pleasures in the after-life as a reward for their devotions and meritorious acts. The Vedas are divided into two sections. One section deals with rites and sacrifices, which promise their performers happiness in heaven and pleasure and power in their next birth on earth. The other section deals with the Knowledge of the Self, which leads to liberation. The results of the rites and sacrifices performed with desires are ephemeral, for they are limited by time, space, and the law of causation. But when performed without desire for results, these religious rites purify the mind.

The practice of the Vedic rites does not lead to liberation.

45

The Vedas deal with the three gunas. Be free, O Arjuna, from the three gunas. Be free from the pairs of opposites. Be always established in sattva. Do not try to acquire what you lack or preserve what you have. Be established in the Self.

Vedas—Refers to the karmakânda, or ritualistic section, of the Vedas.

Gunas—The word "guna" is a technical term of Sâmkhya philosophy, also accepted by Vedânta. According to Sâmkhya, the two principal categories are Purusha and Prakriti. The former denotes the Soul, or Consciousness, and the latter, Nature, or matter, which is dull and insentient. Prakriti consists of the three gunas, namely, sattva, rajas, and tamas. Rajas, denoting restlessness, is the active principle in Nature. Tamas is the principle of inertia. And sattva, serenity and harmony, is the equilibrium between rajas and tamas. As Prakriti consists of the three gunas, every object in Prakriti

is compounded of these three elements. Samsāra, or relativity, is the realm of the gunas. Freedom is beyond them. Even the highest experiences of heaven come within the realm of the gunas and are therefore limited by the laws of Nature or matter.

Free from the three gunas—Free from all desires.

Pairs of opposites—All correlated ideas and sensations, for instance, good and evil, pleasure and pain, heat and cold, light and darkness.

Be always established in sattva—Be always balanced; do not be swayed by either extreme. Sattva enables an aspiring soul to go beyond the gunas and attain freedom.

Do not try to acquire etc.—Striving people are restless and unfit for the highest Knowledge.

Be established in the Self—Be on guard and do not yield to the objects of the senses.

Arjuna is asked to follow these injunctions while engaged in the performance of his duty.

What is the use of the Vedas?

46

To the enlightened* Brāhmin all the Vedas are of as much use as a pond when there is everywhere a flood.

* Enlightened Brāhmin—One who has realized Brahman, or the truth concerning Absolute Reality.

The various purposes of a pond, a well, and other reservoirs are more than served by an all-encompassing flood. Likewise, the various pleasures that result from the performance of the works enjoined in the Vedas are included in the Bliss enjoyed by a Brāhmin enlightened with Self-knowledge. All kinds of limited bliss are included in the Infinite Bliss. A knower of the Self does not need to follow the Vedic injunctions. This does not mean, however, that the Vedas are useless. They serve the purpose of the unenlightened.

Through the performance of the works prescribed by the Vedas one becomes fit for the path of knowledge.

For Arjuna the performance of action is imperative.

47

To work, alone, you are entitled, never to its fruit. Neither let your motive be the fruit of action, nor let your attachment be to non-action.

Work, alone—Arjuna is not ready for the path of knowledge.

Never to its fruit—If a man longs for the fruit of action, he will have to reap it in the future. An action produces bondage when it is performed with a desire for its fruit.

Non-action—Non-action is possible only for the lowest being or the highest saint.

The word "karma" (work) has different meanings. It primarily means action. It also means the tendencies, impulses, habits, characteristics, and so on, formed by action, and thus it denotes the subtle impressions of action, which determine the future embodiment, environment, and, in short, the whole future life, whether on earth or in any other plane of existence. A third meaning of karma, often used in reference to one's caste or position in life, is duty, the course of conduct one ought to follow in pursuance of the tendencies acquired as a result of past actions, with a view to working them out and regaining the pristine purity of the Self.

If a man ought not to be impelled to an action by desire for its results, how, then, should he perform it?

48

Being established in yoga, O Dhananjaya, perform your actions, casting off attachment and remaining

even-minded both in success and in failure. This evenness is called yoga.

Yoga—The state of being an instrument in the hand of God, having given up even the desire that through our action we shall please Him. Only thus can one remain unconcerned as to success and failure.

Attachment—The notion that arises when a man regards himself not as the instrument but as the doer of an action.

Success—Including the attainment of knowledge as the result of the mind's having achieved purity through works performed without any longing for result. or, equally, failure to attain same.

The secret of karmayoga is complete effacement of one's individuality and total identification with God's will. Thus alone does the worker become free from the joys or griefs that result from the success or failure of his works; thus alone does he enjoy peace while performing his duties.

An action performed with a view to the result is of very inferior value.

49

Far inferior, indeed, is mere action, O Dhananjaya, to action performed with evenness of mind. Seek refuge in this evenness. Wretched are they who work for results.

Mere action—Action performed to gain a result. Such action is the cause of future birth and death, and hence creates bondage.

Evenness—The state of not being exalted or depressed by success or failure. It is not callousness or indifference, but a total devotion of the worker to his duty, whereby he regards himself as an instrument of God. One attains true evenness only as a result of the Knowledge of the Supreme Reality. This Knowledge alone, not any incidental result, should be the goal of work.

Wretched are they etc.—They are wretched indeed who busy themselves with calculation of the gains or losses resulting from their action and thus depart from the world without realizing the Supreme Reality.

The result of performing one's duty with evenness of mind:

50

Endued with evenness of mind, one casts off, in this very life, both good deeds and evil deeds. Therefore strive for yoga. Yoga is skill in action.

Good deeds and evil deeds—These are responsible for one's birth in a higher or a lower world.

Yoga—That is to say, evenness through the realization of God.

Skill in action—If a man performs his duties, maintaining this evenness, then his mind rests on God all the while. Hence evenness is the source of power. Work that otherwise enslaves becomes a means to freedom when performed with evenness of mind.

It is a mistake to think that pleasure is the aim of action. Pleasure is of a transitory nature. The real aim of action is knowledge. Through knowledge one attains detachment and ultimate freedom.

How does action lead to liberation?

51

The wise, of even mind, renounce the fruit of action. Freed from the fetters of birth, they attain the state that is beyond all evil.

Fetters of birth—Birth in the relative world, associated with suffering and death, is a form of bondage. It is the result of action in a previous life.

State—That is to say, liberation.

According to the Hindu view, the life of the world, with its many happy moments, is a bondage and hence not desirable. According to the materialistic view, the life of the world, in spite of its many attendant evils, is very much worth while.

The "evenness" (buddhi) of verses 48-51 can also mean the sāmkhya wisdom, the Knowledge of the Absolute Reality, which is compared in verse 46 to a flood. This flood arises when the mind has been purified by karmayoga.

When does one attain the wisdom that is the result of the purity of mind induced by karmayoga?

52

When your mind has crossed the slough of delusion, you will achieve indifference regarding things already heard and things yet to be heard.

Slough of delusion—Which causes non-discrimination between the Self and the non-Self, or ego, and turns the mind toward the objects of the senses.

Things already heard etc.—Being finite in nature, these things are considered futile. The text does not refer to the injunctions of the scriptures regarding the Knowledge of Ātman, the Self.

It may be asked, how long does one take to attain freedom? This is not a question of time. Freedom refers to an experience that denotes "timelessness." It can be attained at any moment, the only condition being the desirelessness of the aspirant. One must be free from attachment to objects attainable in this world or in heaven.

When does one attain the true yoga, or the Knowledge of the Supreme Truth?

53

When your mind—now perplexed by what you have heard—stands firm and steady in the Self, then you will have attained yoga.

What you have heard—The conflicting views of the various religious books, regarding happiness and the other ends of life.

Firm and steady—Free from distraction and doubt.

Yoga—Complete absorption in God-consciousness, or samādhi, which is the result of discrimination between the Real and the unreal.

What are the characteristics of one who has attained wisdom through samādhi?

54

Arjuna said: What, O Keśava, is the description of the man of steady wisdom merged in samādhi? How does the man of steady wisdom speak, how sit, how move?

Steady wisdom—The wisdom that makes a man realize that he is Brahman.

Merged in samādhi—Fully conscious of his identity with Brahman.

The two questions asked by Arjuna are: (1) How is a man of steady wisdom described by others? (2) How does the influence of wisdom manifest itself when the man comes out of samādhi? The answer runs from verse 55 to the end of the chapter. It includes the characteristic attributes of a man of steady wisdom and also the means of attaining such wisdom. These attributes apply to one in whom dispassion for work and devotion to knowledge (jnāna) are innate, and also to one who, as the result of the practice of karma-yoga, has become ready for the practice of jnāna.

The means of attaining Knowledge are also the characteristic attributes of the man who has attained Knowledge. In this discipline the means and the end are the same.

55

The Lord said: O Pārtha, when a man completely casts off all the desires of the mind, his Self finding satisfaction in Itself alone, then he is called a man of steady wisdom.

Itself—The innermost Self of man, which is the same as the Supreme Reality.

Such a man does not long for external possessions, for he enjoys the Supreme Bliss of Self-knowledge. A man of steady wisdom has renounced all cravings for progeny, wealth, and attainment of heaven, and enjoys the bliss of communion with the Self. This answers the first part of Arjuna's question.

Moreover,

56

He who is not perturbed by adversity, who does not long for happiness, who is free from attachment, fear, and wrath, is called a muni of steady wisdom.

Adversity—Men may be victims of three kinds of adversity: ādhyātmika, arising from disorder of the body; ādhibhautika, arising from external objects, such as tigers or snakes; ādhidaivika, arising from the action of great cosmic forces, such as those that cause rain, storms, or earthquakes.

Long for happiness—Fire flares up when fuel is thrown upon it; but in the case of a man of wisdom, his happiness does not create a longing for more happiness.

Attachment—To outward objects.

Fear—He is free from fear because of his constant communion with the inner Self.

Wrath—He is free from wrath because he regards all beings as his own Self.

Muni—A man given to meditation and contemplation.

This and the two following verses answer the second part of Arjuna's question, as to the conduct of one of steady wisdom

Moreover,

57

He who is not attached to anything, who neither rejoices nor is vexed when he obtains good or evil—his wisdom is firmly fixed.

Anything—Such as his body, children, friends, and so on.

Who neither rejoices nor is vexed—Consequently does not praise or blame anything. This answers Arjuna's query: "How does he speak?"

Moreover,

58

When he completely withdraws the senses from their objects, as a tortoise draws in its limbs, then his wisdom is firmly fixed.

Withdraws—This is the process of pratyāhāra, described in Yoga. According to this discipline the mind is fixed on the Self; in the absence of attention the sense-organs are withdrawn from their objects.

The tortoise, when frightened, draws in its limbs instantly and without effort. Likewise, a man of steady wisdom can at any moment enter into samādhi without the least effort.

Then his mind is completely withdrawn from the outer world.

It is seen that the senses of ignorant, sick, or infirm persons, too, are withdrawn from their objects. But such persons retain their taste for those objects. How can the taste be withdrawn?

59

The objects of the senses fall away from a man practising abstinence, but not the taste for them. But even the taste falls away when the Supreme is seen.

A man practising abstinence—An unillumined person practising austerity for a worldly goal and abstaining from sense-enjoyments. The phrase can refer also to a sick person or an imbecile, who is incapable of enjoying sense-pleasures. These all retain the longing for enjoyment.

Repression or inhibition due to illness or selfish causes is completely different from the self-control practised by yogis. In the former case there is only a physical abstention, but the mind retains its longing. In the latter case the subtle desire disappears as well, on account of the yogis' attainment of the Supreme Bliss in communion with the Self. This Bliss is like an all-encompassing flood, which removes the need for wells or ponds.

The uncontrolled senses injure aspirants seeking spiritual illumination.

60

The turbulent senses, O son of Kunti, violently carry off the mind even of a wise man striving for perfection.

Even a man of discrimination falls prey to the temptation of the world. Therefore the aspirant must not relax his effort for self-control.

Wherefore,

61

The yogi restrains them all and remains intent on Me. His wisdom is steady whose senses are under control.

Me—The Supreme Lord, who is the innermost Self of all.

The turbulent senses can be brought under control only by love of God and through His grace. It is impossible to subjugate the senses through one's own efforts, unaided by prayer. The difference between the moral path of the agnostic and the religious path of the devotee is that the former emphasizes self-effort, and the latter, humility and surrender to God.

The very thought of sense-objects causes future misfortune.

62-63

When a man dwells on objects, he feels an attachment for them. Attachment gives rise to desire, and desire breeds anger.

From anger comes delusion; from delusion, the failure of memory; from the failure of memory, the ruin of discrimination; and from the ruin of discrimination the man perishes.

Objects—Any thing or person that is perceived.

Failure of memory—Regarding the lessons learnt from the scriptures and the teacher, and also from past experience.

Perishes—Is unable to attain the spiritual goal.

"A beautiful image appears. The tendency of the mind is to repeat it. Then, if the image is allowed to recur, a liking grows. With the growth of liking the wish to come close, to possess, appears. Any obstacle to this produces wrath. The impulse to anger throws the mind into confusion, which

casts a veil over the lessons of wisdom learnt by past experience. Thus deprived of his moral standard, he is prevented from using his discrimination. Failing in discrimination, he acts irrationally, on the impulse of passion, and paves the way to moral death. Thus Krishna traces moral degradation to those first breaths of thought, that come softly and almost unconsciously to the mind."—Swami Swarupananda's commentary on the Gītā.

If thinking of objects leads to suffering, what leads to peace?

64

The man of self-control, moving among objects with his senses under restraint, and free from attachment and hate, attains serenity of mind.

The man of self-control—He who has controlled the mind.

Objects—Such objects as are indispensable for preserving one's life.

Free from attachment and hate—Attachment and hate are natural in the presence of pleasant and unpleasant objects.

The seeker after God, with a mind completely under control, allows his senses to enjoy those objects that are necessary for the maintenance of life, but always preserves the evenness of his mind, whether the objects be pleasant or unpleasant. Thus he attains peace, serenity, and clear vision. This verse answers Arjuna's question: "How does he move?"

What does one attain through serenity?

65

In that serenity there is an end of all sorrow; for the intelligence of the man of serene mind soon becomes steady.

An end of all sorrow—Sorrow is due to lack of discrimination between good and evil, true and false, which is noticed in the case of restless people.

Steady—Centred on the Self.

The man whose mind is serene and whose intelligence is steady has achieved his goal. Therefore, with a mind devoid of attachment and hate, the yogi should enjoy only those sense-objects that are indispensable for the preservation of his body.

Peace of mind alone leads to happiness.

66

The man whose mind is not under his control has no Self-knowledge and no contemplation either. Without contemplation he can have no peace; and without peace, how can he have happiness?

Contemplation—On the nature of the Self.

True happiness is not in the thirst for objects but in the restraint of the senses from thirst for enjoyment. Thirst is misery indeed.

Why is the unsteady man incapable of Knowledge?

67

For even one of the roving senses, if the mind yields to it, carries away discrimination as a gale carries away a ship on the waters.

Roving senses—The senses wildly pursuing their objects.
Discrimination—The discrimination of the mind.

If a single uncontrolled sense can plunge a man into such a plight, the calamity of the man with all senses uncontrolled requires no underscoring. As a gale carries away a ship

from her charted course and drives her astray, so the force of the uncontrolled sense carries away the aspirant's attention from Self-knowledge and turns it toward worldly objects.

Now the Lord concludes the topic of the subjugation of the senses:

68

Therefore, O mighty Arjuna, his wisdom is steady whose senses are completely restrained from their objects.

The man of steady wisdom can, at will, withdraw the senses from their objects and enter into communion with the Self.

69

In that which is night to all beings, the man of self-control is awake; and where all beings are awake, there is night for the muni who sees.

To the ignorant the Supreme Reality is night. They see in It confusion and darkness. But the man of steady wisdom is fully awake with regard to Reality. Again, the manifold world of time and space is clear as day to the ignorant; but the man of wisdom sees in it the confusion of night.

Ignorance, or nescience, creates the idea of multiplicity and also of duty associated with means and ends. Knowledge removes the idea of multiplicity and also that of duty. Wherefore an ignorant person engages in the performance of duty with a view to attaining a result, and the wise never deviates from Self-knowledge and does not yearn for anything as yet unattained.

The desireless person alone attains peace.

70

Not the desirer of desires attains peace, but he into

whom all desires enter as the waters enter the ocean, which is full to the brim and grounded in stillness.

Waters from innumerable rivers enter the ocean; but this does not make the ocean overflow its bounds or change its nature, for it is based in stillness. Likewise, that man alone finds true peace in whom no agitation is created by the enjoyment of those objects with which he inevitably comes in contact during his life on earth. A man attains such a state through constant awareness of the unchangeable Reality that constitutes his innermost Self. He who looks outside for enjoyments never attains peace.

Because this is so,

71

That man who lives completely free from desires, without longing, devoid of the sense of "I" and "mine," attains peace.

Lives—He lives only to work out his prārabdha karma, the action of his previous life that has produced his present body.

Desires—Even for the barest necessities of life.

Sense of "I" and "mine"—He is not egotistic about anything, not even about his scholarship and knowledge.

The verse refers to a man of complete renunciation, always aware of his identity with Brahman.

Devotion to Knowledge is extolled:

72

This is the Brāhmic state, O son of Prithā. Attaining it, one is no longer deluded. Being established therein even in the hour of death, one attains final liberation in Brahman.

Brāhmic state—The state of Brahman, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.

No longer—A jnāni is never again deluded by the world.

Attaining the Knowledge of Brahman, even as late as the hour of death, one obtains final liberation. And what doubt can there be about the liberation of a man who practises the discipline of renunciation from an early age and dwells on Brahman throughout life?

Thus in the Bhagavad Gītā, the Essence of the Upanishads, the Science of Brahman, the Scripture of Yoga, the Dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna, ends the Second Chapter, entitled:

THE WAY OF ULTIMATE REALITY

THE WAY OF ACTION

1

Arjuna said: If You hold, O Janārdana, that knowledge is superior to action, why, then, O Keśava, do You engage me in this terrible action?

Both the path of work and the path of knowledge and renunciation, for the purpose of attaining Self-knowledge, are described in the Gītā. In Chapter II, verses 55-72, Sri Krishna recommends to the jnānis the path of renunciation. But in verse 47 He asks Arjuna to follow the path of action. He does not say, however, that Arjuna will experience the Supreme Bliss as the direct result of action. Arjuna's dilemma is this: How can the Lord first describe to him, a devout seeker of Bliss, the path of knowledge and renunciation, but then command him to an action attended by many obvious evils? How does one attain the Knowledge of Brahman? Along the path of action? Or along the path of renunciation? Or by some conjunction of the two? According to Śankara the conclusion of the Bhagavad Gītā, and also of the Upanishads, is that Brahman can be directly realized only by the path of knowledge and renunciation, and not by any other means.

The second chapter gives a summary of the teaching of the Gītā: The aspirant for liberation must first practise motiveless action, surrendering the results to God. That will purify his heart. Next, he will practise discrimination, renunciation, and other disciplines, and give up worldly duties. Thus he will feel single-minded devotion to God. Next, this devotion will create a longing for the Knowledge of Reality, which destroys avidyā, or ignorance, which is compounded of the three gunas. With the destruction of ignorance the

aspirant will achieve cessation of birth and death in the relative world and thus ultimate liberation.

Arjuna feels confused by the Lord's praise of both the righteous war (II, 31-38) and the Knowledge of Brahman.

2

With these apparently contradictory words You seem to confuse my understanding. Therefore tell me definitely that one thing by which I shall reach the Highest Goal.

Seem to confuse—There is no confusion in the Lord's words; but to the dull understanding of Arjuna they seem confusing.

That one thing—If knowledge and action are intended for two distinct classes of aspirants and cannot be followed by one and the same person, then Arjuna asks Krishna to teach him the one best suited to himself in accordance with the state and power of his understanding.

The Lord's reply is in conformity with the question.

3

The Lord said: Even of yore, O sinless one, a twofold devotion was taught by Me to the world: devotion to knowledge for the contemplative and devotion to work for the active.

Of yore—In the beginning of the created world. Even at the very beginning of the cycle of time, two classes of people, those with contemplative and those with active temperaments, were in existence.

Contemplative—As a result of meritorious action in previous lives, they are born, as it were, with a clear knowledge of the Self and the non-Self. They renounce the world even without embracing the householder's life and belong to that

highest class of sannyāsis known as paramahamsas, whose thoughts always dwell on Brahman. For those pure souls the path of knowledge is prescribed so that they may mature their knowledge of Brahman.

Active—Those who believe in external action as a means of self-unfoldment. Their understanding is still coloured by the stain of duality. The performance of unselfish action purifies their souls and enables them to practise knowledge and contemplation.

According to Hindu philosophy the practice of a particular spiritual discipline is determined by the competence of the aspirant. Both the active and the contemplative have one goal, namely, the realization of Brahman. The path of action, however, does not lead directly to that realization.

An aspirant should perform his duties, determined by his birth and position in society, until he achieves purity of mind and becomes competent to follow the path of knowledge. There cannot be any knowledge of Brahman unless the mind is pure.

4

Not by merely abstaining from action does a man reach the state of actionlessness, nor by mere renunciation does he arrive at perfection.

Action—Different forms of worship, as well as other duties, through the performance of which a man purifies his mind.

Actionlessness—Perfection. Action, as it is generally understood, is the outcome of want and desire. A perfect man, on account of his Self-knowledge, is desireless and hence abstains from egotistic action.

Renunciation—Abandonment of action before fitness to pursue the path of knowledge has been achieved.

The performance of action is a way to freedom from activity. Through devotion to action one earns devotion to

knowledge. Through unselfish action the seeker eliminates his selfish desires, and then attains the state of mind in which peace and the contemplation of Reality are enjoyed. As long as a man regards himself as a finite being he must work. But when he knows himself to be the infinite Spirit, he abstains from all egotistic activities.

Why does a person not attain perfection by mere renunciation unaccompanied by knowledge?

5

Verily, no one can remain even for an instant without doing work. For, driven by the gunas born of Prakriti, everyone is made to act, in spite of himself.

No one—The reference is to the unillumined, or ignorant, who are under the control of the gunas.

Gunas—These are sattva, rajas, and tamas. See note on II, 45.

In the case of an ignorant person all action is performed at the bidding of the gunas. The gunas belong to the non-Self, and an ignorant person cannot discriminate between the Self and the non-Self. A man of Knowledge, too, performs some action, perhaps for the preservation of his body. But he does not identify himself with Prakriti, or Nature. He is always conscious of his freedom from the gunas. In his case the gunas may perform their functions, but he remains completely unaffected.

An ignorant person must not neglect the duties enjoined upon him.

6

He who restrains his organs of action, but continues to dwell in his mind on the objects of the senses, deludes himself and is called a hypocrite.

Restrains etc.—In order to give himself or others an impression that he is meditating on God.

Organs of action—Hands, feet, vocal organ, and the organs of generation and evacuation.

True renunciation is not just the control of the organs of action or abstention from physical movement. It is the control of the mind and the organs of perception. It is the absence of longing for activity. An active mind and an actionless body do not indicate the life of sannyāsa. A person possessed of these has an impure mind and becomes sinful by embracing the monastic life.

7

But he who restrains his senses with his mind and directs his organs of action to work, with no feeling of attachment—he, O Arjuna, is indeed superior.

He who restrains etc.—Refers to an ignorant person, who is fit only for the path of action.

Senses—The five organs of perception.

Superior—Such a seeker will attain Knowledge through purification of the mind.

A true karmayogi engages in outer action but is inwardly detached from its result. It is not the action itself, but the greediness of the mind for the result, that strengthens our bondage to the world.

Wherefore,

8

Do your allotted action; for action is superior to inaction. And even the bare maintenance of your body will not be possible if you remain inactive.

Allotted—The action allotted by the scriptures to different persons in accordance with their inherited tendencies.

A man conscious of his body and its demands must not remain inactive. But the case is quite different with a sannyāsi, who is free of body-consciousness.

Unselfish action does not create bondage.

The world becomes bound by action unless it be done for the sake of Sacrifice. Therefore, O son of Kunti, give up attachment and do your work for the sake of the Lord.

Sacrifice—The Sanskrit word "yajna" means a religious rite, a sacrifice, or worship; it also denotes any action performed with a spiritual motive. Further, the word means the Supreme Lord, in which sense it is used in this verse.

Work that is done with a view to pleasing the Lord and not from any personal motive does not bind the worker.

There is another reason for the enjoining of work upon those who cannot follow the path of knowledge:

10

The Prajāpati, in the beginning, created men together with Sacrifice, and said: "By this shall you multiply. Let this be the Cow of Plenty and yield unto you the milk of your desires.

Prajāpati—The Creator, or Brahmā.
Sacrifice—In this verse the word means the sacrifices or religious rites mentioned in the ritualistic portion of the Vedas.

Men were created with a propensity for action, which is the means of self-expression and happiness in the lower stage of spiritual development. The performance of obligatory duties ensures welfare for all in the relative world.

How can welfare be achieved by sacrifice?

11-12

"With sacrifice shall you nourish the gods; and may the gods nourish you. Thus nourishing one another, you will obtain the Highest Good.

"The gods, nourished by sacrifice, will bestow on you the enjoyments you desire." He is verily a thief who enjoys the things that they give without offering to them anything in return.

Gods—The word in Sanskrit is "devas," literally, "shining ones." When a human being performs meritorious action on earth, he becomes a god after death and occupies a temporary position in heaven, where he is given charge of a cosmic process. Thus the Hindu scriptures describe the god of fire, the god of wind, the god of the ocean, and so on. See note on "Indra," IX, 20.

Highest Good—Knowledge of Brahman or happiness in heaven, depending on the motive of the aspirant. The sacrifice may be performed either for liberation or for worldly enjoyment. In the former case the sacrifice leads to purity of heart in this or in a subsequent life and ultimately conduces to the Knowledge of Brahman, whereas in the latter case it leads the sacrificer to heaven.

Enjoyments—Such as wife, children, wealth.

Thief—All householders owe debts to the gods, the rishis, and the ancestors. The gods are those who control the cosmic processes. The rishis are those who have given the culture to the race. The ancestors are those to whom man owes his body and life. The debts to these are repaid by sacrifice, by the study of scripture, and by the begetting of children. He who enjoys the pleasures of life without paying the above-enumerated debts is indeed a thief.

In this relative world men and gods are interdependent. They are nourished by one another. Men offer oblations to the gods; the gods in return ensure men's welfare by send-

ing rain and other gifts. Thus a chain of mutual obligation binds together all created beings.

Those who act in a spirit of sacrifice are superior persons.

13

Good men, who eat the remnant of the sacrifice, are freed from all sins; but wicked men, who cook food only for themselves, verily eat sin.

Remnant of the sacrifice—Food should first of all be offered to the gods and then enjoyed by men. In a broader sense, all action should be performed for the satisfaction of the Lord. Egotistic action is condemned.

All sins—Every householder commits inevitably the five-fold sin of killing, which results from the use of (1) the pestle and mortar, (2) the grinding-stone, (3) the oven, (4) the water-jar, and (5) the broom. He is absolved from the sins by the performance of the five obligatory duties known as yajna, or sacrifice. The five sacrifices are: devayajna (the offering of sacrifices to the gods), brahmayajna (the teaching and reciting of the scriptures), pitriyajna (the offering of libations of water to the ancestors), nriyajna (the feeding of the hungry), and bhutayajna (the feeding of the lower animals). The performance of these five daily sacrifices, or duties, spiritualizes life and establishes concord and harmony between the living and the dead, as well as between the superhuman, human, and subhuman worlds. The selfish life is transformed into an unselfish one. The individual becomes aware of the interdependence of all beings.

Action should be performed by those who are qualified for it; for it is action that sets the wheel of the cosmos going.

14-15

From food all creatures are born; from rain food

is produced; *from* sacrifice comes rain; sacrifice is born of action.

Know that action arises from the Vedas, and the Vedas from the Imperishable. Therefore the all-pervading Vedas ever rest in sacrifice.

Creatures—Reference to the physical bodies of created beings, which are produced from the seminal fluid and the ovum, the products of food.

Rain—"The offering thrown into the fire reaches the sun; from the sun comes rain; from rain, food; and from food, all creatures." (*Manu*, III, 76) The subtle principle into which sacrificial deeds are converted after they have been performed, and through which they later appear as fruit, is called "apurva." The apurva is the connecting link between the sacrifice and the fruit, the cause and the effect.

Action—The sacrifice prescribed in the Vedas, in which priests and sacrificer take part.

Imperishable—The Supreme Reality.

The all-pervading Vedas—As the breath comes out of a man, so the Vedas illumine all subjects and are the infinite store of knowledge. They deal with sacrifices and the modes of their performance.

The Supreme Reality is the source and basis of the Vedas, which prescribe for householders sacrifice or action. Therefore action should be performed.

The wheel of the cosmos has been set in motion by the Supreme Lord. Hence action is to be performed by all who are conscious of being parts of the relative world.

16

Thus was the wheel set in motion; and he who does not follow it, but takes delight in the senses and lives in sin, O Pārtha, lives in vain.

The wheel—It was set in motion by the Creator, Prajāpati, on the basis of the Vedas and the sacrifices.

Follow it—By studying the Vedas and performing the sacrifices therein enjoined.*

Takes delight in the senses—Acts for the enjoyment of sense-pleasures and not for the gratification of the Lord.

The sense of this section (III, 4-16) is that the man ignorant of the Self should perform action for the purification of the mind. When the mind is purified, the aspirant becomes fit for Self-knowledge. A person still desirous of worldly ends may not refrain from action.

Karmayoga is not meant for knowers of the Self.

17

But verily, the man who rejoices in the Self and is satisfied with the Self and is content in the Self alone—he has nothing for which he should work.

The man who rejoices etc.—Who has renounced all worldly attachment and is devoted to the Knowledge of the Self alone; a sannyāsi.

Rejoices in the Self—Not in the objects of the senses.

Is satisfied with the Self—Not with food and drink.

Is content in the Self—Not in the possession of external things.

A person endowed with Self-knowledge has no worldly duties to perform. According to the *Brihadāranyaka Upanishad,* the knowers of Brahman, endowed with Self-knowledge, renounce the desire for offspring, for wealth, and for the worlds; they lead a mendicant life, maintaining their bodies with only the barest necessaries. (III, v, 1)

Further,

18

He has no object to gain by what he does in this world, nor any to lose by what he leaves undone; nor

is there anyone, among all beings, on whom he need depend for any object.

He—The man rejoicing in the Self.

Object to gain—He is not anxious for merit in order to enjoy happiness in heaven.

Any to lose—He is not afraid of demerit. Being totally devoid of ego, he is beyond the injunctions of the scriptures.

Anyone, among all beings—From the Creator, Brahmā, to a blade of grass. A man endowed with Self-realization does not seek the support of anyone in the relative world. Even the gods cannot injure him, he being the inmost Self of them also. Harm from higher cosmic powers is possible only before the attainment of Self-knowledge, because an unillumined, or ignorant, person sees multiplicity and considers himself to be separate from others. All fear comes from the perception of duality.

Since you have not yet attained Self-knowledge,

19

Therefore always do without attachment the work you have to do; for a man who does his work without attachment attains the Supreme.

A seeker who does his duty for the gratification of God attains purity of mind and ultimately realizes the Highest Goal.

Wise men in the past acted in that manner.

20

Verily, by action alone men like Janaka attained perfection. Further, you should perform work with a view to guiding people along the right path.

The scriptures mention kshatriya sages who, in spite of their attainment of Knowledge, did not give up work. They

attained purity of mind through the performance of duty and then realized Brahman. But their prārabdha karma made them continue their royal duties for the maintenance of the world order. Arjuna, too, should set an example of righteous living to the people by doing his kshatriya duties.

How can a man guide people by performing his own duties?

21

Whatever a great man does, that others follow; whatever he sets up as a standard, that the world follows.

Common people are more influenced by the living examples of great men than by the abstract teaching of the scriptures.

There is the example of the Lord Himself.

22

I have, O Pārtha, no duty; there is nothing in the three worlds that I have not gained and nothing that I have to gain. Yet I continue to work.

Sri Krishna speaks of Himself as the Godhead. Though He transcends all claims of duty, yet He acts according to the scriptural injunctions to set an example to others.

Inactivity on the part of Krishna would cause the ruin of all.

23

For should I not ever engage, unwearied, in action, O Pārtha, men would in every way follow in My wake.

Follow in My wake—Because Sri Krishna is known to be the best ideal to follow.

What then would happen?

24

If I should cease to work, these worlds would perish: I should cause the mixture of castes and destroy all these creatures.

Would perish—It is by action that the relative universe is sustained.

Should Krishna, the ideal man, desist from work, then people would not perform religious and moral actions. Social confusion would ensue. The Lord would thus bring about people's ruin instead of their welfare.

Therefore the man of Self-realization must work for the welfare of the world at large.

25

As the ignorant act, attached to their work, O Bhārata, so should an enlightened man act, but without attachment, in order that he may set people on the right path.

An ignorant person acts zealously for his personal happiness; but a wise man should act, with the same zeal, for the welfare of others.

The only incentive to action for a knower of the Self is the welfare of others.

26

Let no enlightened man unsettle the understanding of the ignorant, who are attached to action. He should engage them in action, himself performing it with devotion.

Unsettle—An ignorant person firmly believes that one should act to enjoy the result of work. The wise man should not unsettle this belief; otherwise the ignorant man would prematurely give up all work.

If the wise must act as the ignorant, then wherein lies the difference between them?

27

All work is performed by the gunas of Prakriti. But he whose mind is deluded by egotism thinks, "I am the doer."

Gunas of Prakriti—The gunas modify themselves into the outside world, the body, and the senses. These are the performers of all action. The Self looks on without participating in any way in the action done by the body and senses. An ignorant man, however, identifies the Self with the aggregate of the body and the senses, and thinks that the Self is the doer. Thus he ascribes to the Self all the characteristics that really belong to the gunas.

For "gunas" see note on II, 45.

But the enlightened man feels differently.

28

But, O mighty Arjuna, he who knows the truth about the gunas and action, and what is distinct from them, holds himself unattached, perceiving that it is the gunas that are occupied with the gunas.

What is distinct from them—That is to say, the Self.

The enlightened man sees that the gunas in the form of the senses are occupied with the gunas in the form of the objects of sense, and that this constitutes man's action. So he always holds himself unattached, allowing the gunas to perform

their natural functions. The difference between an active enlightened man and an active ignorant man is that the former is beyond the influence of the gunas, whereas the latter is controlled by them.

The topic under discussion is now concluded:

29

Those who are deluded by the gunas of Prakriti attach themselves to the actions that those gunas prompt. Nevertheless let no man who knows the whole unsettle the minds of the dull-witted, who know only a part.

Who knows the whole—The wise man, who through Self-knowledge knows everything.

Who know only a part—Those who do not see anything beyond the immediate effect of an action.

The wise should not confuse the ignorant, who are attached to the gunas and action, by instructing them in Self-knowledge, which makes one give up worldly duties.

How should duties be regarded by those who seek liberation but are still attached to the gunas?

30

Surrendering all action to Me, with mind intent on the Self, freeing yourself from longing and selfishness, fight—unperturbed by grief.

Me—Krishna, the Divine Being, the Supreme Lord, the Omniscient, the Self of all.

Intent on the Self—Constantly remembering that one acts at the direction of the Lord, who is seated in one's heart as the Inner Guide.

The following is the result of the action described above:

31

Those who, full of faith, ever follow this teaching of Mine and do not carp at Me—they too are released from their works.

Faith—A mental attitude consisting primarily of sincerity of purpose, humility, and reverence. See note on XVII, 3.

Do not carp at Me—Do not find fault with the Lord; do not feel that He has engaged the worker in a painful action.

They too—As well as the jnānis.

Released from their works—Released from the merit and demerit that are the inevitable result of work.

The worker, too, sincerely surrendering the results of action to God and full of divine love, becomes free, like the jnāni, from the good and evil results of his action, and realizes Truth.

The evil effect that comes from disobeying the Lord's injunction:

32

But those who carp at My teaching and practise it not—know that such senseless men, blind to all wisdom, are doomed to destruction.

Those who have no faith in the words of the Lord, as revealed through the scriptures and the words of a competent teacher, and maliciously refrain from the performance of their duties, cannot discriminate between right and wrong and ultimately come to ruin.

Why do some people neglect their duties, thus disobeying the Lord's injunction? It is because their lower nature proves too strong for them.

33

Even the man of knowledge acts in accordance with his own nature. All beings follow their nature; what can restraint do?

Nature—A man's prakriti, or nature, is formed by the impressions of the good and evil acts performed in a previous life; it manifests itself at the beginning of the present life. This nature is the mainspring of the man's action.

Restraint—Forcible repression of the senses.

If a man must follow his own nature, then where is the scope for personal exertion? If man's own efforts are futile, then scriptural injunctions, too, are futile.

34

The love and hatred that the senses feel for their objects are inevitable. But let no one come under their sway; for they are one's enemies.

Love and hatred—Love for the agreeable and hatred for the disagreeable.

Let no one come etc.—This is the injunction of the scriptures. Herein lies the field of man's efforts.

The senses have natural likes or dislikes for their objects, and men generally are influenced by them. But the seeker after Truth exercises his discrimination and subdues, at the very outset, this strong attachment and aversion. Like a swift-moving river, the wild senses drag a man along to destruction; but man should exercise self-effort and jump into the boat of scriptural teachings and arrive safely at his destination. Man should exert himself to overcome his natural beastly propensities and follow the dictates of righteousness.

Under the misguidance of love and hatred, a man may mistake another's duty for his own. This generally happens when one's own duty becomes beset with suffering and pain.

35

Better is one's own dharma, though imperfectly performed, than the dharma of another well performed. Better is death in the doing of one's own dharma: the dharma of another is fraught with peril.

Arjuna's desire to desist from fighting, which is the duty of a kshatriya, and to follow the peaceful and calm life of a hermit, is due to a natural instinct to shun the disagreeable and accept what is agreeable to the senses.

Arjuna asks for a clear statement regarding the source of evil.

36

Arjuna said: But under what compulsion does a man commit sin, O Vārshneya, in spite of himself and driven, as it were, by force?

Vārshneya—*Lit.,* one belonging to the clan of the Vrishnis; an epithet of Krishna.

Man can discriminate between good and evil. He wants to do good; but he does evil, as though against his own wishes. He seems to be constrained by an outside force.

37

The Lord said: It is desire, it is wrath, which springs from rajas. Know that this is our enemy here, all-devouring and the cause of all sin.

Desire—Desire alone is the enemy of the whole world, the cause of all evil.

Wrath—Desire, being obstructed, takes the form of wrath.

Springs from rajas—Rajas is the cause of evil and suffering. Therefore desire brings only suffering. Sattva overcomes rajas and keeps desire under control.

All-devouring—Desire is never satiated by the gratifica-

tion of desire. One gets rid of desire only through the constant practice of detachment.

Cause of all sin—Man commits sin only at the bidding of desire.

How is desire our enemy?

38

As fire is concealed by smoke, as a mirror by dust, as an unborn babe by the womb, so is Knowledge concealed by ignorance.

The three illustrations refer to the different degrees to which desire in the form of ignorance envelops and conceals the inner Light in man.

39

Enveloped is Knowledge, O son of Kunti, by the insatiable fire of desire, which is the constant foe of the wise.

Insatiable fire—"Desires can never be satiated by the gratification of desires. The more they are enjoyed, the more they grow, as fire by the pouring into it of butter." (*Mahābhārata.*)

An ignorant person regards a desire as a friend when he is craving its fulfilment, but realizes it to be an enemy when he discovers that suffering alone is the after-effect of enjoyment. But a wise man, even before suffering the consequence of a desire, knows it to be an evil; he does not have to wait for the result. Hence desire is the constant enemy of the wise.

Krishna points out the seat of desire, the fortress of the enemy, by the conquest of which the enemy is easily defeated.

40

The senses, the mind, and the understanding are

said to be its seat; through these it veils Knowledge and deludes the embodied soul.

Through these—Desire vitiates the senses, the mind, and the understanding, veils Knowledge, and at last traps man in the net of delusion.

41

Therefore, O lord of the Bhāratas, control your senses at the outset and slay this foul destroyer of Knowledge and Realization.

Knowledge and Realization—Knowledge of the Self is first learnt from the scriptures and the teacher. Then, through constant contemplation, it is transformed into Realization.

Where should one stand in order to cast off desires?

42-43

The senses are superior, they say; superior to the senses is the mind; superior to the mind is the understanding; superior to the understanding is He. Therefore know Him who is superior to the understanding, control the self by the Self, and destroy, O mighty Arjuna, the enemy, who comes in the guise of desire and is hard to overcome.

Superior—The senses are superior to the body. The body is gross and limited; the senses, comparatively speaking, are subtle and have a more extensive sphere of action.

Mind—Which consists of thoughts and desires and is of the nature of error and doubt. The mind is superior to the senses, for it directs their action.

Understanding—Which is characterized by determination and finality and is therefore superior to the mind.

He—The Self of man, the Dweller in the body, the Witness of the activities of the body, senses, mind, and understanding.

Control the self by the Self—By the Knowledge of the Higher Self one controls the lower self, that is to say, the mind.

Thus in the Bhagavad Gītā, the Essence of the Upanishads, the Science of Brahman, the Scripture of Yoga, the Dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna, ends the Third Chapter, entitled:

THE WAY OF ACTION

Chapter Four

THE WAY OF KNOWLEDGE

1

The Lord said: This eternal yoga I taught to Vivasvat; Vivasvat taught it to Manu; and Manu taught it to Ikshvāku.

This eternal yoga—The yoga taught in the second and third chapters. The fruit of this yoga is liberation, which transcends time, space, and causality.

Vivasvat—The Sun-god.

Manu—The ancient law-giver of India.

Ikshvāku—The ancestor of the kshatriyas who trace their origin to the Sun-god.

In the beginning of the present cycle the Lord taught the eternal law regarding jnānayoga to the Sun-god, who transmitted it to the kshatriyas, the rulers of the world. By this knowledge the kshatriyas were strengthened. Only strong kshatriya kings can protect the brāhmins, who constitute the spiritual caste in Hindu society. When the military and the brāhmin castes are preserved, the social order is maintained. According to Hinduism the spiritual laws laid down in the Vedas are eternal. Through pure-souled rishis they are revealed anew at the beginning of each cycle.

Jnānayoga, discussed in the second and third chapters, is based on renunciation and is attained through the performance of duty. Thus it comprehends both the life of activity (pravritti) and the life of retirement (nivritti) as taught in the Vedas. The path of knowledge has been described throughout the Gītā as leading directly to liberation. Therefore the Lord extols it by pointing out its antiquity.

2

Thus handed down from one to another, it became known to the royal sages. But through long lapse of time, O destroyer of foes, this yoga has been lost to the world.

The teachings of this yoga were lost by falling into the hands of selfish and unrighteous people. It is the intention of Sri Krishna to revive it through the Gītā.

3

The same ancient yoga I have told you today; for you are My devotee and friend, and it is a supreme secret.

Supreme secret—A secret that should be revealed only to those worthy of it.

Arjuna cannot understand how Sri Krishna could have taught this yoga to Vivasvat, who was born much earlier than He.

4

Arjuna said: Later was Your birth, and earlier the birth of Vivasvat. How, then, am I to understand that You taught him in the beginning?

The unenlightened Arjuna thinks Sri Krishna is an ordinary man and not the omnipotent and omniscient Lord. Krishna wishes to remove this error.

5

The Lord said: Many a birth have I passed through, O Arjuna, and so have you. I know them all, but you know them not, O scorcher of foes.

Sri Krishna knows the past, present, and future because He is the Lord Himself. He is unobstructed in His power

of vision. But Arjuna, an ordinary mortal bound by ignorance, has only limited vision.

The Lord is untouched by dharma and adharma; therefore His birth was unlike that of an ordinary man.

6

Though I am unborn and eternal by nature, and though I am the Lord of all beings, yet, subjugating My Prakriti, I accept birth through My own māyā.

Eternal by nature—The Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, which forms the nature of the Lord, is eternal and changeless.

My Prakriti—Māyā, which is made of the three gunas, namely, sattva, rajas, and tamas, and deluded by which the embodied being does not recognize the Lord, who is his true Self. This māyā inheres in Brahman, but Brahman remains unaffected by it. It is like the poison of the cobra, which is in the cobra but cannot injure it.

Through My own māyā—It is through māyā that the Lord appears to be born. His embodiment is not real, as are the embodiments of other beings.

Actions, good and evil, produce the body in order that the embodied soul may experience their results. The soul assumes a body for such experience, and this is called birth. After the experience has been accomplished, the body is discarded, and that is called death. Therefore dharma and adharma are responsible for the birth of an embodied being. The embodiment of the Lord, on the other hand, cannot be due to dharma and adharma. He is not subject to the law of karma. He is the Lord of the universe and the Ruler of all laws, gross and subtle. The law of karma can affect only those who have egoistic and selfish motives. The Lord is free from ego. Therefore His embodiment as a human being is unlike the embodiment of other men. He assumes a human form, retaining His power over the inscrutable

māyā by which other beings are bound. This māyā remains as a self-imposed limitation of the Lord as long as He chooses to dwell in a human body. On account of māyā He acts like a human being; but it does not affect His nature. After His mission in the world is over, He Himself withdraws māyā and regains His incorporeal nature. His activities in the world are for the purpose of setting an example to men. The embodiment of the Lord is only an appearance. A created being is under the control of māyā, but the Lord is the controller of māyā. The birth and death of the Lord depend on His own will; but the birth and death of an embodied being are due to the law of karma. This is the difference between an embodied being and the incarnate Lord.

When does the Lord assume a body?

7

Whenever there is a decline of dharma, O Bhārata, and a rise of adharma, I incarnate Myself.

Dharma—See note on II, 7.

For what purpose?

8

For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of dharma, I am born in every age.

Destruction—The Lord is above love and hate. By destroying wickedness the Lord shows the way of liberation to the wicked.

In every age—The embodiment of the Lord is not confined to one particular age.

When righteousness is protected and wickedness destroyed, society lives according to dharma and affords opportunities to its members to lead a spiritual life.

What awaits the man who knows the true meaning of the Lord's embodiment and action in the world?

9

Whoso knows, in the true light, My divine birth and action will not be born again when he leaves his body; he will attain Me, O Arjuna.

My divine birth—The Lord appears to be born, but in reality is beyond birth and death.

Action—The Lord is in reality beyond all action, though He appears to act for the cause of righteousness.

The man who knows the Lord's real nature as the Absolute Spirit, and also His embodiment in māyā, has realized the Ultimate Truth. Thus he transcends birth and death in the relative world and attains Brahman.

The path of liberation taught here by Krishna is an ancient path.

10

Freed from passion, fear, and anger, absorbed in Me, taking refuge in Me, and purified by the fire of Knowledge, many have become one with My Being.

The path of liberation taught here has been known and followed by seekers since the very beginning of creation and was not given to the world only by the Lord's Incarnation as Krishna.

The Lord may be accused of partiality in that He bestows Self-knowledge on some and withholds it from others. The answer follows:

11

In whatsoever way men approach Me, even so do

I reward them; for it is My path, O Pārtha, that men follow in all things.

The Lord is not gracious to some and unkind to others. He is not open to the charge of granting liberation to some and withholding it from others. Different people seek the Lord with different motives. He rewards them all by granting their desires. But one cannot seek, at the same time, liberation and fulfilment of worldly desires. Wherefore the Lord bestows pleasures on those who seek pleasures; rewards unselfish men, who perform their prescribed duties and aim at liberation, by granting them discrimination; and rewards men of discrimination, who have renounced the world in pursuit of liberation, by granting them liberation. Likewise, the Lord rewards men in distress by rescuing them from their distress, and rewards seekers after wealth by giving them wealth. In whatever form a man worships the Lord, the Lord appears to him in that form. The various deities and cosmic forces, the angels, the Prophets, and the Incarnations are only different manifestations of the Lord Himself. If a man worships one of these for a definite purpose, he is worshipping the Lord Himself and the Lord fulfils that purpose. As there are innumerable ideals cherished by men, so there are innumerable forms of the Lord corresponding to those ideals. It is to Him alone that men offer worship under different names and forms, through different symbols and rites; likewise, from Him alone comes the fulfilment of all desires, whether they be for the enjoyment of worldly pleasures or for the realization of the Supreme Truth. As the Self within, He brings to fruition all wishes when the necessary conditions are fulfilled.

The following doubt arises: The Lord is free from love and hate. He is gracious to all creatures without distinction. He can fulfil every desire. Why do people not desire liberation and seek the Lord Himself? The answer follows:

12

Those who desire success in their works worship

the gods here; for quickly, in this world of man, comes success from works.

People longing for worldly success worship minor gods or angels, who also are manifestations of the Lord. But on account of their selfish motives, their mode of worship is characterized by the attitude that the devotee and the god are two different beings. "He who, on the other hand, worships a separate god, thinking, 'He is separate from me and I am separate from him'—he knows not. He is to the gods as cattle are to men." (*Brihadāranyaka Upanishad,* I, iv, 10) Worldly success is quickly and easily attained, but not so Self-knowledge. Therefore people do not seek the latter.

Men are endowed with diverse temperaments and tendencies. All men are not born equal, because in them the preponderance of the different gunas varies.

13

The four castes were created by Me according to the division of gunas and karma. Though I am their Creator, yet know that I neither act nor change.

Four castes—These are the brāhmin, kshatriya, vaiśya, and śudra.

Division of gunas and karma—The gunas are sattva (goodness and harmony), rajas (foulness and activity), and tamas (darkness and inertia). The karma, or action, of a brāhmin, in whom sattva predominates, is characterized by control of the mind, control of the senses, austerity, etc. (XVIII, 42) The action of a kshatriya, in whom rajas predominates and sattva is controlled by rajas, is characterized by heroism, high spirit, etc. (XVIII, 43) The action of a vaiśya, in whom rajas predominates and tamas is controlled by rajas, consists of agriculture, cattle-rearing, and trade. (XVIII, 44) The action of a śudra, in whom tamas predominates and rajas is controlled by tamas, consists only of service. These four castes, determined by the division of gunas and action,

have been in existence among the Indo-Āryans since the *very beginning of their society.* Much later the hereditary caste-system was introduced, when the population increased enormously and other complexities of social life followed.

Though I am their Creator—The Lord is the Creator of the four castes only from the standpoint of māyā. Māyā is the immediate cause of everything that happens in the relative world. But since māyā has no existence independent of the Lord, He is said to be the Creator.

Neither act nor change—The Lord is not the agent, because He has no egoistic or selfish motive in the creation of the universe. For the same reason He remains unchanged by whatever happens in creation. It is selfish motives that bring about a change in the doer through the success or failure of his action.

The ignorant may speak of the Lord as the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer of the universe, but in reality He is not so.

14

Action does not defile Me; nor do I long for its fruit. He who knows Me thus is not bound by his action.

Does not defile Me—Because the Lord is totally free from egoism. Since He is unselfish, He is not reincarnated, like men, to reap the fruit of His action.

He who knows Me thus etc.—Anyone who knows his own inmost Self to be the Lord, unattached to action and its result, is not bound by action and will not be reborn in the world of māyā.

The Lord is described as the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer of the universe only from the standpoint of māyā. But He Himself is absolutely unattached. He has not created the world through any special desire. How can He, in whom all desires find their fulfilment, be moved by a desire to

create? The universe is the spontaneous movement of His nature, as the waves are of the ocean. It is the līlā, or sportive pleasure, of the Lord.

The seekers of Truth in ancient times worked in that spirit.

15

Men of old who sought liberation knew this and did their work. Therefore do your work as the ancients did in former times.

Men of old—King Janaka and others.

Knew this—That is to say, that the Self cannot have any desire for the fruit of action, nor can It be defiled by action.

Everyone conscious of his body must work. If he is ignorant, he should work for self-purification, and if he is wise and a knower of Truth, he should work to set an example to others. Sri Krishna expounds to Arjuna an ancient spiritual discipline.

The philosophy of action and inaction is extremely subtle.

16

Even the wise are perplexed as to what is action and what is inaction. Therefore I will tell you what action is, that you may know and be freed from evil.

Evil—The round of birth and death in māyā.

One must not oversimplify action and inaction by thinking that the former means the activity of the body, and the latter, its idleness.

17

For verily, one has to understand what action really is, and likewise what forbidden action is, and also

what inaction is. Hard to understand is the way of action.

Action—That which is prescribed by the scriptures and not merely approved by men.

Forbidden action—That which is forbidden by the scriptures.

Inaction—Renunciation of action.

Sri Krishna describes the true nature of action and inaction:

18

He who sees inaction in action, and action in inaction, he is wise among men, he is a yogi, and he has performed all action.

Inaction in action—It is only the ignorant that regard the Self as active. The yogi regards the Self as actionless even while he himself is engaged in action. Activity belongs to the body, the senses, and the mind. It is a function of the gunas.

Action in inaction—The body, the senses, and the mind, regarded by the ignorant as actionless, are perceived by the yogi to be active. Hence he sees action in what the ignorant think to be inaction. Or the passage can mean: An ignorant person may strive hard to remain inactive because he regards work as the cause of suffering, and inaction as the way to knowledge. Such a person, though apparently inactive, is really active, since his mind is full of ideas. A wise man sees action in such inaction.

Performed all action—A wise person, devoid of the idea of agency, is really a free soul though he participates in action. Action does not bind him.

Action and inaction are not rightly understood; the one is mistaken for the other. Sri Krishna intends to remove this mistake. The real Self of man is actionless. Action pertains to the physical body, the senses, and the mind. But an unillumined, or ignorant, person falsely attributes action to the

Self and says to himself, "*I* am the doer, *mine* is the action, by *me* will the fruit of action be reaped." Similarly, he falsely imputes to the Self the cessation of activity, which really pertains to the body and the senses, as also the happiness that results from such cessation; he says to himself: "I shall be quiet that I may be free from work and worry and be happy. I am quiet now; I am happy."

Through right knowledge a man sees inaction in action; he sees that action commonly associated with the Self really belongs to the body, and that the Self is actionless. Likewise, a man with right knowledge sees action in inaction; he knows that inaction is also a kind of action. Inaction is a correlative of action and pertains to the body. The Self is beyond action and inaction.

He who knows the meaning of action and inaction as expounded above is wise among men; he is a yogi. He does all action without being bound; he is free from the evil result of action. He has achieved everything.

The wisdom described in the foregoing verse is extolled:

19

He whose undertakings are all free from desires and self-will, and whose works are consumed in the fire of Knowledge—he, by the wise, is called a sage.

Free from desires and self-will—He has no egoistic purpose behind his action. If he is engaged in a worldly action, he performs it with a view to setting an example to men; if he has renounced the worldly life, he performs action only for the bare maintenance of his body.

Fire of Knowledge—The wisdom described in the foregoing verse is compared to a fire that consumes all good and evil deeds.

Even though a wise man may be seen engaging in action, his work is really no work.

20

Giving up attachment to the fruit of action, ever content, and dependent on none, though engaged in work, he does no work at all.

Ever content—Satisfied with the wisdom described in IV, 18.

Dependent on none—He has no desire to secure enjoyment in this life or hereafter.

Though engaged in work—Such a man may engage in work.

This is how a man of wisdom is described: He is always absorbed in the thought of God. He may engage in action that is necessary for the bare maintenance of his body. He might have been active before, but after his attainment of Knowledge he abandons action, since he finds no use for it. If he finds that for some reason or other he cannot give up action, he continues to work in order to set an example to the world. Or he may work in order to avoid offending the righteous men of society. Such a man, though engaged in action, is really not involved in it, since he never loses his consciousness of the actionless Self. His action is consumed in the fire of the knowledge described in IV, 18.

Sri Krishna speaks of the liberation of him who has realized his identity with Brahman, the innermost Self of all, who is free from the desire for enjoyment both here and hereafter, who therefore abstains from all action intended to secure objects of pleasure, who has renounced all action except what is necessary for the maintenance of his body, and who is steady in his devotion to Knowledge:

21

Free from desire, with body and mind controlled, and surrendering all possessions, he incurs no sin through mere bodily activity.

Sin—This includes dharma, or merit, also. In the case of a man seeking the ultimate freedom, dharma, too, is an obstacle, like sin; for it creates bondage in the form of a result. Only he who is free from both dharma and adharma, merit and demerit, is liberated from samsāra, the round of birth and death in the relative world.

Bodily activity—Action necessary for the bare existence of the body, and that, too, without any attachment such as is implied in the words "*I* do." Since it is impossible for such a man to do any wrong, which may be called sin, he is not subject to rebirth in the relative world.

The import of the text seems to be that a knower of Brahman is always absorbed in his communion with the Absolute. Generally no outside activity is possible for him. Action for the bare maintenance of the body is done by him without any real identification with the body.

Things necessary for the maintenance of his body come to him without any effort on his part.

22

Satisfied with what comes to him without any effort on his part, rising above the pairs of opposites, free from envy, and even-minded in success and failure, though acting, he is not bound.

Without any effort etc.—That is to say, unsolicited or by chance.

Even-minded—He remains calm whether or not he gets such things as might come to him without effort.

Though acting—Putting forth a minimum of action to secure the bare existence of the body.

Is not bound—Because he sees action in inaction, and inaction in action, knows that he does nothing at all, realizes that the gunas act upon the gunas, and is ever steady in the true Knowledge of the Self.

From the standpoint of the world such a man may appear to engage in action for the maintenance of his body, but from his own standpoint he is not the agent of the action. The egoistic motive of action has been consumed, in his case, in the fire of Knowledge.

There are some sages who begin life, on account of their prārabdha karma, as active men and then realize that the Self is the actionless Brahman. Though they are then entitled to give up works, yet for some reason they continue to be active as before. Such sages, too, are from their own standpoint inactive.

23

The works of a man whose attachment is gone, who is free, and whose mind is established in Knowledge, melt away entirely, being done as for a yajna.

Free—Free from the bondage imposed by both dharma and adharma.

Yajna—An action that is done with a view to pleasing the Lord, and not from any selfish motive. See note on "sacrifice," III, 9-10.

How is it that the action of such a man melts away without producing any result?

24

To him Brahman is the offering and Brahman is the oblation, and it is Brahman who offers the oblation in the fire of Brahman. Brahman alone is attained by him who thus sees Brahman in action.

Offering—The instrument by which the oblation is poured into the fire.

After attaining the Knowledge of Brahman, a man sees Brahman in everything. He sees Brahman in every part of

the action: the instrument, the doer, the result, and the action itself. These have no existence apart from Brahman, just as the mirage has no existence apart from the desert. What appears to be water to the ignorant, is nothing but the desert. Likewise, what appears to the unenlightened as the instrument of action, the doer, and so on, is realized by one who is endowed with the Knowledge of Brahman as Brahman Itself. To him everything is Brahman.

Thus the action performed by the knower of Brahman to set an example to the world is in reality no action, since all the accessories of action are consumed, as it were, in the fire of Brahman. The Knowledge of Brahman removes all duality. Therefore action performed by a knower of Brahman melts away with its result and cannot bind its performer.

After describing the Knowledge Sacrifice, the Lord proceeds to enumerate other kinds of sacrifice in order to extol the former as the highest:

25

Some yogis offer oblations to the devas alone, while others in the fire of Brahman offer the self by the self.

Yogis—Those who are devoted to action.

Devas—*Lit.*, shining ones. The word generally means deities such as the Rain-god and the Sun-god. See note on "Indra," IX, 20; also the glossary.

Others—Other knowers of Brahman.

Fire of Brahman—Brahman, described in the scriptures as Consciousness, Knowledge, and Bliss, and as the innermost Self of all. It is devoid of all limitations imposed by time, space, and causality.

The self—The self is in reality Brahman, but appears as the individual through association with the body, mind, intelligence, and senses.

To know the conditioned self as one with the unconditioned Brahman is to sacrifice the self in the fire of Brah-

man. This sacrifice is performed by those who have renounced all action and are devoted to the Knowledge of Brahman.

26

Some offer oblations of hearing and the other senses in the fires of restraint; and some offer sound and other sensations in the fires of their senses.

The yogis described in the first part of the text restrain the senses from their respective objects; those described in the second part direct the senses only to pure and unforbidden objects.

27

Some, again, offer all the actions of the senses and the functions of the prāna as oblations in the fire of self-control, kindled by knowledge.

Prāna—The vital breath, which sustains life in a physical body; the breath. In the books of yoga, prāna is described as having five modifications, according to its five different functions. They are: prāna (the vital energy that controls breath), apāna (the vital energy that carries downward unassimilated food and drink), samāna (the vital energy that carries nutrition all over the body), vyāna (the vital energy that pervades the entire body), and udāna (the vital energy by which the contents of the stomach are ejected through the mouth). According to some writers on yoga, prāna and apāna mean, respectively, the in-going and the out-going breath.

Fire of self-control—Deep and one-pointed meditation.

In this case all the objects of the senses, as also all the actions of the body, together with the functions of the prāna, are dissolved in meditation, made one-pointed by discriminative wisdom.

28

Some, likewise, offer as oblations their wealth, austerity, and yoga; while others, of disciplined minds

and severe vows, offer their scriptural study and knowledge.

Wealth—Giving away wealth to deserving persons.

Yoga—Comprises such practices as breath-control and the withdrawal of the mind from the objects of the world.

Knowledge—The understanding of the contents of the scriptures.

29

Some, again, constantly practising the regulation of prāna, offer the oblation of prāna into apāna, and apāna into prāna, or stop the passage of both prāna and apāna. Yet others, restricting their food, offer their prānas in the prānas.

Prāna into apāna—Refers to a kind of breath-control called puraka (filling in).

Apāna into prāna—Refers to a kind of breath-control called rechaka (emptying).

Stop the passage etc.—A kind of breath-control known as kumbhaka.

Restricting their food—According to some teachers of yoga the student should fill half his stomach with food, one quarter with water, and leave one quarter free for the movement of air.

Offer their prānas etc.—Refers to a method of breath-control by which the aspirant controls a life-breath and sacrifices into it all the other life-breaths; these latter become, as it were, merged in the former. The different kinds of breath-control here referred to are described in rājayoga and hathayoga.

The result of the twelve sacrifices described above:

30-31

All these know what sacrifice means, and by sacrifice are their sins consumed. Eating of the amrita, the

remnant of a sacrifice, they go to the Eternal Brahman. This world is not for him who makes no sacrifice, O best of the Kurus, much less the other.

Eternal Brahman—They realize the Eternal Brahman after attaining Knowledge through purification of the heart.

This world—The human world, where there is not much happiness.

The other—Heaven, which abounds in happiness.

The literal meaning of the text is that those who perform the sacrifices mentioned above and eat the food prescribed in the scriptures, in a prescribed manner, attain Brahman in course of time if they desire liberation. The food so eaten is called amrita, or the elixir of immortality. The deeper meaning seems to be that all activities should be performed as a sacrifice, that is to say, in an unselfish spirit, surrendering the results to God. Action done in this spirit enables the doer to enjoy happiness on earth, if he still has any such lingering desire, or to attain Brahman, in due course, if he seeks liberation. But action performed in an egotistic spirit deprives one even of earthly happiness, not to speak of spiritual bliss.

32

Thus many kinds of sacrifice are strewn through the pages of the Vedas; know them all to be born of action, and you will be free.

The sacrifices described above do not touch the Ātman, or Self, which is actionless. By realizing that the Self is free from all action, one attains right knowledge and becomes free from the bondage of samsāra.

The Knowledge Sacrifice was described in IV, 24. Then other sacrifices were enumerated in 25-29. The latter enable the sacrificer to achieve human ends, whereas through Knowledge one realizes ultimate freedom. Hence the praise of the Knowledge Sacrifice.

33

The Knowledge Sacrifice is superior to all material sacrifices, O scorcher of foes; for all works, without exception, culminate in Knowledge.

Material sacrifices—Sacrifices performed with material objects produce only material results.

Culminate in Knowledge—The Knowledge of Brahman comprehends all action.

How does one gain that exalted Knowledge?

34

Learn it by prostration, by inquiry, and by service. The wise, who have seen the Truth, will teach you that Knowledge.

Prostration—The symbol of humility and reverence.

Inquiry—The disciple should ask the teacher about bondage and liberation and about ignorance and Knowledge.

Who have seen the Truth—Only the man who has realized the Truth is entitled to give spiritual instruction. Mere theoretical knowledge, however perfect, does not qualify one to be a spiritual teacher.

Humility, the spirit of inquiry, and personal service rendered to the teacher are the conditions of discipleship.

The result of Knowledge:

35

When you have known it, O Pāndava, you will not again fall into delusion; and through it you will see all beings in your Self and also in Me.

It—The Knowledge of Brahman.

Delusion—Relating to the death of Arjuna's friends and relatives assembled on the battle-field.

The Self and the Lord are identical. All beings, too, are identical with the immortal Self; through ignorance they appear as separate.

36

Even if you are the most sinful of sinners, yet by the raft of Knowledge alone will you be borne over all sin.

The worldly life, uninspired by Spirit, is of the nature of sin and is compared to a limitless ocean. But the knower of Truth crosses it by the help of the raft of Self-knowledge.

How does Knowledge destroy sin?

37

As a fire, well kindled, reduces wood to ashes, so, O Arjuna, does the fire of Knowledge reduce all works to ashes.

Reduce all works to ashes—It renders them ineffective, so that they cannot bind the worker by producing results.

All works—There are three kinds of action: sanchitā, āgāmi, and prārabdha. The sanchitā karma is the vast store of accumulated actions done in the past, the fruits of which have not yet been reaped. The āgāmi karma is the action that will be performed by the individual in the future or the action performed by him in this life before his attainment of Knowledge. The prārabdha karma is the action that has begun to fructify, the fruit of which is being reaped in this life; it is a part of the sanchitā karma inasmuch as this also is action done in the past. But the difference between the two is that whereas the sanchitā karma is not yet operative, the prārabdha has already begun to bear fruit. The body lasts as long as the momentum given by the prārabdha karma remains. Knowledge destroys all karmas except the prārabdha karma; even a man of Knowledge must experience its result. But since he has realized the freedom and the blissful nature

of the Soul, the prārabdha karma affects only his body; his mind is always absorbed in the consciousness of Brahman.

Therefore,

38

Verily, there exists no purifier on earth equal to Knowledge. A man who becomes perfect in yoga finds it within himself in course of time.

No purifier on earth—It is by Knowledge that sins are destroyed, as also ignorance, which is their cause.

Perfect in yoga—Through the performance of selfless duty and the practice of contemplation.

The surest means of acquiring Knowledge:

39

He who is full of faith and zeal and has subdued his senses obtains Knowledge; having obtained Knowledge, he soon attains the Supreme Peace.

Faith—In the teachings of the guru.

Zeal—Intense devotion to the means of obtaining Knowledge.

Subdued his senses—Mere external acts such as prostration, inquiry, and the rendering of personal service, as described in IV, 34, may be performed by an insincere person. But insincerity is impossible for a seeker who has practised the inner discipline described in this verse.

The Supreme Peace, or liberation, immediately follows the Knowledge of Brahman. No other intermediary discipline, such as the practice of yoga or the performance of specific duties, is necessary. An aspirant practises yoga or performs his duties prior to the attainment of Knowledge, for the purification of his mind.

One must not doubt the above instruction.

40

But the man who is ignorant and without faith and always doubting goes to ruin. Not this world nor the world beyond nor happiness is for the doubting soul.

Ignorant—One who does not know the Self.

Always doubting—One who doubts his ability to attain Self-knowledge.

The man who is ignorant of the Self or without faith may easily enjoy material happiness on earth. But the doubting person is never happy. Owing to his sceptical disposition, he suspects people and things around him. He is doubtful concerning the world beyond.

41

Works do not bind the man, O Dhananjaya, who relinquishes action through yoga, whose doubts are destroyed by Knowledge, and who is self-possessed.

Works—Works accomplished after the attainment of Knowledge. A man endowed with Self-knowledge realizes that action is the natural behaviour of the gunas in the form of the senses toward the gunas in the form of objects, and that the Self remains unaffected.

Do not bind—By producing good or bad results.

Who relinquishes action etc.—That is to say, he who surrenders the fruit of his action to the Lord and views alike success and failure.

Self-possessed—Ever watchful over his self.

42

Therefore with the sword of Knowledge cut asunder this doubt about the Self, born of ignorance and residing in your heart, and devote yourself to yoga. Arise, O Bhārata!

The sword of Knowledge—The Knowledge by which one discriminates between the body and the Self and which consequently destroys grief and delusion.

Yoga—Karmayoga, which is a means of attaining right knowledge.

Arise—In order to fight. Fighting is the dharma of the kshatriya Arjuna.

Thus in the Bhagavad Gītā, the Essence of the Upanishads, the Science of Brahman, the Scripture of Yoga, the Dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna, ends the Fourth Chapter, entitled:

THE WAY OF KNOWLEDGE

Chapter Five

THE WAY OF RENUNCIATION

1

Arjuna said: You praise, O Krishna, the renunciation of works, and also yoga. Tell me for certain which of these two is the better.

Yoga—In this and the following verses the word means karmayoga, or the performance of selfless action as a yoga or spiritual discipline.

In IV, 18, 19, 21, 22, 24, 32, 37, and 41, the Lord has emphasized the renunciation of all works; and in IV, 42, He has asked Arjuna to engage in yoga, the performance of action. Now, these two injunctions are mutually opposed; they cannot be followed by the same individual at the same time. Arjuna wants to know which of the two, action or renunciation, would be conducive to his spiritual welfare.

2

The Lord said: Both renunciation and yoga lead to the Highest Good; but of the two, performance of action is superior to renunciation of action.

The performance of action is necessary for those aspirants who are conscious of multiplicity—the doer of the action, its accessories, and its results. Arjuna does not see the difference between the body and the Soul. He is grief-stricken at the thought of the death of his relatives. He is under the spell of ignorance. So Sri Krishna recommends for him the performance of action for the purification of his mind. The knowledge that is born in a pure heart gradually becomes mature through renunciation of action accompanied by the contemplation of Reality.

Why so? The answer follows:

3

He who neither hates nor desires may be known as constantly practising renunciation; for, free from the pairs of opposites, O mighty Arjuna, he is easily freed from bondage.

He—A karmayogi, or performer of action.

Neither hates nor desires—Neither hates pain or objects causing pain, nor desires pleasure or objects causing pleasure. Either love or hate generally motivates all our worldly actions.

Practising renunciation—Even while performing action he is like a sannyāsi, who formally renounces worldly duties.

The Lord contradicts the view that sannyāsa and karmayoga, meant for two different types of people, are opposed to each other and that they produce contrary results:

4

It is children, and not the wise, that speak of the path of knowledge and the path of action as distinct. He who is firmly set on one reaches the end of both.

Children—The ignorant.

Path of knowledge—The path of sannyāsa, the goal of which is the attainment of Self-knowledge through the renunciation of works.

Path of action—The discipline of this path is to maintain equanimity in success and failure.

End of both—That is to say, liberation through Self-knowledge. There is no difference so far as the ultimate result is concerned.

How can a man follow one path and obtain the result of both?

5

The state reached by men of renunciation is reached by men of action too. He who sees that the way of renunciation and the way of action are one—he truly sees.

State—The state of liberation.

Men of renunciation—Sannyāsis, who follow the path of knowledge.

Men of action—Those who perform action, surrendering the result to God. Through selfless action they attain purity of mind and thus qualify themselves for the path of knowledge.

One—Because both ultimately produce the same result, namely, liberation through Self-knowledge.

As a result of karmayoga followed in previous lives, the sannyāsis are born with pure minds and entitled to the path of knowledge. The workers through selfless action will first attain purity of mind and then be able to follow the path of knowledge leading to liberation.

The Lord, in V, 2, has declared that performance of action is superior to renunciation of action. In that verse both performance and renunciation of action are used in a mechanical sense. The mere performance of action, without the practice of equanimity as regards the result, is declared to be superior to the mere renunciation of action uninspired by knowledge, because the latter is the outcome of tamas. Real renunciation, based upon knowledge and known as sāmkhya, leads to liberation. Those who practise such renunciation are known as sannyāsis or jnānis. Action performed without any desire whatsoever for the result is known as yoga, and the performers of such action are known as yogis. They surrender the result of action to God and, being purified through action, become fit for knowledge, which leads to liberation.

If the aspirant after liberation must renounce action in the end, why should he not do so at once?

6

But renunciation of action, O mighty Arjuna, is hard to attain without performance of action; the sage, purified by devotion to action, quickly reaches Brahman.

Renunciation of action—Which is based upon knowledge and is resorted to by true sannyāsis.

Hard to attain—One cannot be devoted to the path of knowledge without purity of mind.

Performance of action—In which the worker surrenders the result to God and does not seek it for himself.

Sage—The word "muni" in the text describes one who meditates on the Lord.

Brahman—The word is used here to denote renunciation (sannyāsa). "What is called nyāsa is Brahman; and Brahman is verily the Great." (*Taittiriya Upanishad.*)

A sage, purified by the performance of selfless action, soon attains Brahman, the true renunciation, in which state he devotes himself steadily to Self-knowledge. Hence, for the beginner, the performance of action is better than its renunciation, as declared by the Lord in V, 2.

Action generally creates bondage; how, then, can one devoted to action attain Brahman?

7

He who is devoted to yoga and is pure in mind, who has conquered his body and subdued his senses, who has realized his Self as the Self of all beings—he is undefiled though he acts.

Devoted to yoga—Karmayoga, or selfless action.

All beings—All creatures from Brahmā to a blade of grass.

Undefiled—Not bound by action.

Though he acts—To set an example to others.

He is free from all taint of ego.

8-9

"I do nothing at all," thinks the yogi, the knower of Truth; for in seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting; in walking, breathing, and sleeping;

In speaking, emitting, and seizing; in opening and closing the eyes, he is assured that it is only the senses busied with their objects.

Yogi—The karmayogi, who is devoted to selfless action.

A man endowed with the Knowledge of the actionless Self sees inaction in action; for he realizes that in all works the senses occupy themselves with their objects and that the Self remains inactive. He may be said to have renounced action, for he sees no action as performed by himself.

But the man who has not yet attained Self-knowledge may also remain untainted by the result of his action.

10

He who works without attachment, resigning his actions to Brahman, is untainted by sin, as a lotus-leaf by water.

Resigning his actions etc.—He offers all his works to God. He works for God's sake, as a servant works for the sake of his master. He has no attachment to the result of action, even to moksha.

Lotus-leaf by water—Though a lotus-leaf remains in water, it is practically untouched by the water. When it is taken out of the water, no water clings to it.

The result of such action is the purification of the mind, and nothing else.

11

Only with the body, the mind, the understanding, and the senses do the yogis act, without attachment, for the purification of the heart.

Only—Free from egotism and firmly established in the conviction: "I act only for the sake of the Lord and not for my personal benefit." The word "only," in the text, should be understood with the body, mind, and each instrument of action. Whatever instrument of action a yogi may use, he is free from egotism.

Yogis—The karmayogis, who perform selfless action.

How is it that the same action binds some and liberates others?

12

A selfless man who has renounced the fruit of his action attains peace, born of steadfastness. But the man who is not selfless and who is led by desire is attached to the fruit and therefore bound.

A selfless man—He who works for the sake of the Lord and not for his own benefit.

Attains peace etc.—Śankara describes the following stages through which a selfless man attains peace: (1) purity of heart, (2) gaining of knowledge, (3) renunciation of action, (4) devotion to knowledge.

It has been said that the path of selfless action is superior to the path of renunciation for those who are not pure in heart; but the man of pure heart renounces action.

13

The embodied soul who has subdued his senses, having renounced all actions with a discerning mind, dwells happily in the city of nine gates, neither working nor causing work to be done.

All actions—First, nitya, or obligatory, works, such as daily devotions, whose performance does not produce any merit, but whose non-performance produces demerit. Second, naimittika, or those works which should be performed on the occurrence of certain special events, such as the worshjp performed on the birth of a son: these are customary. Third, kāmya, works intended for securing special ends: these are optional. Fourth, nishiddha, or action forbidden by the scriptures. He refrains from all these actions and lives only for the sake of exhausting the prārabdha karma, which has caused his present body.

Dwells happily—Established in Self-knowledge. He is happy because he has given up all action. He is calm and unworried, for he does not take interest in anything pertaining to the relative world.

City of nine gates—That is to say, the body, which has nine openings. These are the two eyes, the two nostrils, the two ears, the mouth, and the organs of generation and evacuation. In such a nine-gated city the embodied soul dwells, having renounced all action. Unlike the ignorant, he does not identify himself with the body. After the exhaustion of the prārabdha karma his soul merges in Brahman.

Neither working etc.—Because he is totally free from the consciousness of "I," "me," or "mine." The Soul is always free from the idea of acting or causing action. Compare: "This Self is said to be . . . unchangeable" (II, 25); "This . . . Self neither acts nor is stained by action even while dwelling in the body" (XIII, 31); "It thinks *as it were* and moves *as it were*" (*Brihadāranyaka Upanishad,* IV, iii, 7).

Ideas of action and actor, etc., are due to māyā.

14

Neither agency nor objects does the Supreme Spirit create for the world, nor does It bring about union

with the fruit of action. It is Nature that does all this.

Agency—The Soul, being perfect by nature, does not of Itself urge anyone to action.

Objects—Objects of enjoyment.

Supreme Spirit—The Supreme Spirit residing in the body.

Union etc.—The union of the doer of an action with the fruit.

Nature—Prakriti, or māyā, whose essential character is inscrutable to the unenlightened mind.

The Soul of man, being one with Brahman, is perfect and filled with bliss. With It no desire or motive can be associated. Prakriti, or māyā, by mere proximity to the Soul, creates the illusory world, the idea of agency, and the fruit of action. The Soul comes under the apparent control of māyā and regards Itself as acting and enjoying the fruits of action. As long as the Soul remains identified with māyā, It is bound. But when It detaches Itself from māyā, It becomes free. Thus such ideas as those of duty, work, and the result belong to the relative world. They have no meaning whatever from the standpoint of the Supreme Lord.

15

Nor does the all-pervading Spirit take on the sin or the merit of any. Knowledge is veiled in ignorance, and thereby mortals are deluded.

Any—Even of His devotees.

The Lord is all-perfect. He is of the nature of eternal Bliss and Love, which cannot be affected by the good and evil of the relative world. As there is neither day nor night from the standpoint of the sun, so there is neither virtue nor vice from the standpoint of the Lord, whose nature is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. Through ignorance man separates himself from the Lord and comes under the spell of the ego. Thus he thinks of himself as the agent of various works, good or evil, and experiences pleasure and pain

accordingly. The law of karma applies only to embodied beings in the relative world. When the aspirant becomes free from ignorance and realizes his identity with the Lord, he goes beyond virtue and vice and is not affected by the results of his actions.

The man of Knowledge is not deluded.

16

But for those in whom this ignorance is destroyed by the Knowledge of the Self, that Knowledge, like the sun, reveals the Supreme.

Knowledge of the Self—The knowledge that discriminates between Self and non-Self.

As the sun destroys darkness and illumines all objects, so also discriminative knowledge dispels ignorance and reveals the Supreme Reality, which is the goal of knowledge.

The result of the Knowledge of God is described:

17

Fixing their minds in Him, at one with Him, abiding in Him, realizing Him alone as the Supreme Goal, they reach a state from which there is no return, their sins having been destroyed by their Knowledge.

Abiding in Him—Renouncing all action and contemplating Him alone.

No return—The Soul of the illumined person does not return to the relative world to assume a physical body, since in his case virtue and vice, the cause of embodiment, are destroyed by the Knowledge of God. He does not come again under the sway of māyā.

Ignorance of God is sin, which is destroyed by Knowledge.

What is the characteristic of Knowledge?

18

The wise see the same in all—whether it be a brāhmin endowed with learning and humility, or a cow or an elephant or a dog or an outcaste.

Humility—Which is the manifestation of inner serenity, the condition of a well disciplined soul.

Brahman alone is the indwelling Self of all. It makes no difference to Brahman whether It is reflected in a human or in an animal medium, as it makes no difference to the sun whether it is reflected in clean or dirty water, or in an ocean or a lake or a mud-puddle.

It may be objected that one who sees sameness in naturally diverse things cannot be wise. The answer follows:

19

Those whose minds are thus set on sameness have even here overcome birth. Brahman is untainted and is the same in all; therefore in Brahman they rest.

Set on sameness—That is to say, who see the same pure Brahman in all beings.

Here—On this earth and in this very life.

Birth—A knower of Brahman, even before his death, cuts asunder the bondage that is responsible for a man's birth and death in the relative world; for he realizes his complete identity with Brahman, which is birthless and deathless.

Untainted—Though Brahman is the indwelling Self even of impure and defective bodies, yet It is uncontaminated by them.

The same in all—The same homogeneous Consciousness, called Brahman, is the innermost Reality of all, irrespective of the different bodies.

They rest—They are always aware of their identity with

Brahman. The defects and blemishes of the body do not affect them.

The injunctions of the scriptures to avoid the wicked and honour the righteous are for beginners in spiritual life, who are conscious of duality.

The knower of Brahman is free from grief and rejoicing.

20

He who knows Brahman and is established in It, he who is undeluded and is steady of mind—he neither rejoices when experiencing what is pleasant, nor is distressed when experiencing what is unpleasant.

Steady of mind—He has the unwavering belief that the same perfect Brahman dwells in all bodies.

Neither rejoices etc.—He who identifies himself with the body rejoices or grieves on receiving what is pleasant or unpleasant. That does not happen to one who is aware of the identity of the Self and Brahman.

21

His heart being unattached to outer objects, he finds the joy that is in the Self; his heart being devoted to the contemplation of Brahman, he enjoys undying bliss.

The happiness from the enjoyment of outer objects is transitory; the Bliss of Brahman is eternal; therefore the former should be renounced in order to enjoy the latter. Through self-control a void is created in the heart; then this is filled with bliss through contemplation of Brahman.

The nature of happiness derived from contact with sense-objects:

22

For the enjoyments that arise from contact with objects are only sources of pain. They have a beginning and an end, O son of Kunti, and the wise find no delight in them.

Sources of pain—All physical pain is traceable to sense-enjoyment. The same is true of sense-enjoyment in the other world. Pleasure derived from worldly objects cannot satisfy the soul's longing for happiness, as the water of a mirage cannot quench the thirst of a traveller in the desert.

A beginning and an end—The contact of one of the senses with its object marks the beginning of a pleasure, and their separation, the end. Thus sense-pleasure is only momentary.

Lust and anger are the two greatest enemies of the path to Bliss.

23

He who is able to withstand the force of lust and anger even here before he quits the body—he is a yogi, he is a happy man.

The force of lust and anger—Kāma, or lust, is the longing one feels for a pleasurable object when one sees it, hears of it, or remembers it. Anger is due to the aversion one feels for a painful and disagreeable object when one sees it, hears of it, or remembers it; or one feels angry when one is obstructed in pursuit of a pleasurable object. Lust and anger create an agitation of mind accompanied by appropriate physical signs.

Before he quits the body—That is to say, up to the point of death. By thus marking death as the limit, the Lord teaches that one can never be sure of having eliminated anger and lust. Their causes are numerous; one should be on guard against them till the time of death. Or the clause may mean that a man should be as indifferent to the force

of lust and anger, before death, as he is after death. A dead body does not react to anger and lust.

What kind of yogi attains Brahman?

24

The yogi who is happy within, who rejoices within, and who is illumined within attains freedom in Brahman, himself becoming one with Brahman.

Within—In the Self.

Such a yogi, while still living in the body, enjoys absolute freedom because of his awareness of his identity with Brahman.

25

With sins destroyed, doubts dispelled, senses controlled, and devoting themselves to the welfare of all beings, the sages attain freedom in Brahman.

Welfare of all beings—That is to say, never inflicting an injury on anyone by word, thought, or deed.

Sages—Men of right vision and total renunciation.

26

Those who are free from lust and anger, who have subdued their minds and realized the Self—those sannyāsis, both here and hereafter, attain freedom in Brahman.

Here and hereafter—They enjoy absolute freedom, whether dead or alive.

The realization of Brahman is briefly described:

27-28

Shutting out all external objects; fixing the gaze of his eyes between his brows; equalizing the outward

and inward breaths moving in his nostrils; controlling his senses, mind, and understanding; being ever bent on liberation; ridding himself of desire, fear, and anger—such a man of contemplation is indeed always free.

Objects—Sound, touch, and other sense-objects.

Fixing the gaze etc.—When the eyes are half closed in meditation, the eye-balls remain motionless, and their gaze converges toward a point between the brows. On the other hand, when the eyes are fully open, they may stray to external objects, and when closed, the man may fall asleep.

Equalizing etc.—By the practice of prāṇāyāma, or breath-control.

Always free—He does not have to follow any other discipline for freedom.

What does a sage realize through meditation?

29

And having known Me, who am the Dispenser of all sacrifices and austerities, the Great Lord of all worlds, the Friend of all beings, he attains Peace.

Me—The Lord, who is Nārāyana Himself and who, in the form of Sri Krishna, is seated in Arjuna's chariot.

Dispenser—The Lord is the presiding Deity of sacrifices and the goal of austerities; He is the dispenser of the fruit of all actions.

Friend—The Lord is the doer of good to all beings.

Thus in the Bhagavad Gītā, the Essence of the Upanishads, the Science of Brahman, the Scripture of Yoga, the Dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna, ends the Fifth Chapter, entitled:

THE WAY OF RENUNCIATION

THE WAY OF MEDITATION

1

The Lord said: He who does the work he ought to do and does not seek its fruit—he is a sannyāsi and he is a yogi: not he who does no work and maintains no sacred fire.

The work he ought to do—Daily obligatory duties. An instance of such duties is the agnihotra, a sacrifice enjoined by the Vedas, requiring fire as an adjunct. According to the Hindu scriptures, householders must perform the daily obligatory duties.

Does not seek its fruit—He who is free from the desire for the fruit of action is not dependent thereon. He does not perform his obligatory duty with a motive, as a means of attaining some specific end.

Sannyāsi—He is to be regarded as a sannyāsi because he has renounced the fruit of action.

Yogi—He is to be regarded as a yogi because he has acquired steadfastness of mind by giving up the desire for the fruit of action.

Does no work—Mere renunciation of action, including what is conducive to the public welfare, such as digging wells or building roads, does not make a person a yogi.

Maintains no sacred fire—A sannyāsi gives up obligatory action in which fire is required as an accessory. Mere renunciation of such action does not make a man a sannyāsi.

He who performs his duty in the spirit described in the text is called a sannyāsi and a yogi only in a secondary sense. The Lord merely praises the householder who performs his duty giving up the desire for its fruit. Duty thus

performed purifies his mind. Gradually he qualifies himself for the practice of meditation. Action is only an external aid to meditation and sannyāsa. A sannyāsi, absorbed in contemplation of Brahman, does not perform any obligatory action.

In what respect is karmayoga, or selfless action, to be considered the same as sannyāsa, or renunciation of action?

2

Know that what they call renunciation is the same as yoga, O Pāndava; for no one who has not renounced his desire can ever become a yogi.

They—Wise men, who are versed in the scriptures.

Renunciation—That is to say, sannyāsa, which consists in the abandonment of all action and its fruit.

Yoga—The performance of selfless action.

The same as yoga—There is a certain amount of similarity between karmayoga and pure sannyāsa, so far as the attitude of the agent is concerned. A real sannyāsi renounces all thought concerning action and its fruit; for thought causes desire, and desire impels one to action. A follower of karmayoga, too, renounces all thought of the fruit while he performs an action; for no one can be a yogi, a man of steadfastness, without renouncing such thought, since the thought of the result creates unsteadiness of mind.

Desire—Samkalpa, the untranslatable word of the text, is "the working of the imaging faculty, forming fancies, making plans and again brushing them aside, conceiving future results, starting afresh on a new line, leading to different issues, and so on and so forth. No one can be a karmayogi, or a devotee of action, who makes plans and wishes for the fruit of action."—Swami Swarupananda.

Sannyāsa and karmayoga are said to be the same because the Lord wants to extol the latter.

Selfless action leads its performer in due course to the yoga of meditation.

3

For a sage who wants to attain yoga, action is said to be the means; but when he has attained yoga, serenity is said to be the means.

Action is said etc.—Through selfless action he purifies the mind. Then he acquires the desire and fitness for meditation.

Serenity—Abstinence from action. Through serenity he is gradually established in Truth.

The more a man abstains from action, the more free he is from trouble, the more his senses are controlled, and the more steady he feels in meditation. According to the *Mahābhārata,* the valuable treasures for a brāhmin are the feeling of oneness and evenness, truthfulness, refinement. steadiness, harmlessness, straightforwardness, and gradua withdrawal from all action.

When is a man said to have attained yoga?

4

When a man has no attachment to the objects of the senses or to works, and when he has wholly renounced his will, he is said to have attained yoga.

Works—These include all works, whether obligatory, customary, or forbidden by the scriptures. Such works do not serve any purpose for the man who has attained yoga.

Will—It is the will that gives rise to the desire for objects in this world and the next. Renunciation of will denotes also the renunciation of desire and action. "O Desire, I know where your root lies. You are born of will (samkalpa). I shall not think of you, and you will cease to exist, with your root." (*Mahābhārata,* Śāntiparva, 177-25)

Only through the attainment of yoga is the self raised from the many evils of worldliness.

5

Let a man be lifted up by his own self; let him not lower himself; for he himself is his friend, and he himself is his enemy.

Be lifted up—From the perilous ocean of the world. The means is the attainment of yoga.

Is his friend—In the practice of yoga, a man's own self, endowed with discriminative knowledge, is the only friend. So-called friends and relatives are in reality the enemies of the aspirant; for, being objects of his affection and attachment, they create bondage.

The idea of friendship and enmity is explained:

6

To him who has conquered himself by himself, his own self is a friend, but to him who has not conquered himself, his own self is hostile, like an external enemy.

He who is self-controlled, who has brought his body and mind under control, is his own friend. But in the case of a man who has no control over himself, his self injures him, like any external enemy.

How a man of self-control is his own friend is further explained:

7

He who has conquered himself and is serene in mind is constantly absorbed in the Supreme Self, alike in heat and cold, pleasure and pain, and honour and dishonour.

Himself—The self that is identified, through ignorance, with the aggregate of the body, senses, and so on.

Constantly absorbed—His own self has actually become one with the Supreme Self.

The highest characteristic of a yogi:

8

He is said to be a steadfast yogi whose heart, through knowledge and realization, is filled with satisfaction, who, having conquered his senses, never vacillates, and to whom a clod, a stone, and gold are the same.

Knowledge—The knowledge of the teachings of the scriptures.

Realization—The experience of the teachings of the scriptures.

Filled with satisfaction—He seeks no satisfaction from any other quarter.

Never vacillates—In the presence of sense-objects. The illustration is given of an anvil, which remains unmoved though constantly struck by the hammer.

9

He who has equal regard for well-wishers, friends, and foes; for those who are related or indifferent to him; for the impartial and the malicious; and even for the righteous and the sinful—he stands supreme.

Equal regard—Free from attachment and aversion. He is not swayed in his opinion of a man by what the other is or does.

Well-wishers—Who do good to another person without expecting anything in return.

Friends—Who do good to another person out of natural love for him.

Indifferent—Who do not take sides with either of the contending parties.

Impartial—Who mean well by both the contending parties.

He stands supreme—He is the best among those who have attained yoga.

The directions for the practice of yoga:

10

A yogi should always try to concentrate his mind, retiring into solitude and living alone, having subdued his mind and body and got rid of his desires and possessions.

The words "solitude," "alone," and "got rid of his desires and possessions" indicate that the life of a sannyāsi is helpful for the practice of this yoga of meditation.

The Lord proceeds to describe particular modes of sitting, eating, and so forth, as aids to yoga:

11-12

In a clean spot having fixed his seat—a firm seat, neither too high nor too low—and having spread over it kuśa-grass, and then a deer skin, and then a cloth,

And sitting there, he should practise yoga for the purification of the self, restraining the activities of his mind and senses, and bringing his thoughts to a point.

The self—The mind.

The posture of the body:

13

He should sit firm, holding his body, neck, and head erect and still, and gaze steadily at the tip of his nose, without looking around.

Gaze steadily etc.—This direction should not be taken in a literal sense; for in that case the mind would be fixed only on the tip of the nose and not on the Self. When the eyes are withdrawn from sense-objects, the mind becomes steady and the eye-balls are still; the gaze is directed, *as it were*, to the tip of the nose. It will be taught later (VI, 25) that the mind should be made to dwell on the Self.

14

Completely serene and fearless, steadfast in the vow of a brahmachāri, disciplined in mind, and ever thinking on Me, he should sit in yoga, regarding Me as his Supreme Goal.

Brahmachāri—A religious student who lives with his teacher and observes the vows of celibacy and chastity and practises other spiritual disciplines.

Me—The Supreme Lord.

The fruit of yoga:

15

Keeping himself ever steadfast in this manner, the yogi of subdued mind attains the Peace abiding in Me—the Peace that culminates in Nirvāna.

Nirvāna—Liberation characterized by freedom and bliss.

Regulations regarding the yogi's food and so forth:

16

Yoga is not for him who eats too much nor for him who eats too little. It is not for him, O Arjuna, who sleeps too much nor for him who sleeps too little.

According to the books on yoga, a yogi should fill half his stomach with food, one quarter with water, and leave one quarter for the movement of air.

How can one succeed in yoga?

17

For him who is temperate in his food and recreation, temperate in his exertion at work, temperate in sleep and waking, yoga puts an end to all sorrows.

This and the preceding text resemble Buddha's teaching regarding the middle path.

When does a man attain yoga?

18

When the well-controlled mind rests in the Self alone, free from longing for objects, then is one said to have attained yoga.

Objects—Seen or unseen, belonging to this world or the next.

An illustration is given:

19

"As a lamp in a windless place does not flicker"—that is the figure used for the disciplined mind of a yogi practising concentration on the Self.

Windless place—A place sheltered from the wind.
Used—By those who are versed in yoga.

Yoga is a unique state of Self-realization.

20-23

That in which the mind, restrained by the practice of concentration, rests quiescent; that in which, seeing the Self through the self, one rejoices in one's own Self;

That in which one knows the boundless joy beyond the reach of the senses and grasped only by the understanding; that in which being established, one never departs from Reality;

That on gaining which one thinks there is no greater gain, and wherein established one is not moved even by the heaviest of sorrows—

Let that be known as yoga, which is severance from the contact of pain. It is to be practised with perseverance and with an undaunted mind.

Seeing the Self through the self—Seeing the supreme Intelligence and the all-resplendent Light by the self, that is to say, by the mind purified through the practice of contemplation.

Beyond the reach of the senses—That is to say, not caused by any sense-object.

By the understanding—Direct and immediate knowledge gained without the instrumentality of the senses. In deep meditation the senses do not function; they are resolved into their cause, the mind. And when the mind becomes steady and cognition alone functions, then the indescribable Self is realized.

Heaviest of sorrows—Even including the pain caused by a sword or other sharp weapon.

Severance from the contact of pain—In the state of yoga one does not feel even a trace of pain, which also includes material happiness inseparable from pain.

Undaunted mind—There should be no relaxation of effort even though there is no quick result and the practice appears difficult.

The supreme discipline regarding yoga:

24-25

Renouncing entirely all the desires born of the will, drawing back the senses from every direction by

strength of mind, let a man little by little attain tranquillity with the help of the buddhi armed with fortitude. Once the mind is established in the Self, he should think of nothing else.

By strength of mind—Endowed with discrimination.

Established in the Self—When the aspirant is convinced that the Self is everything and that nothing else exists besides It.

What should one do if the mind becomes restless under the influence of rajas?

26

Let him withdraw the fickle and unquiet mind from whatever causes it to wander away, and restore it to the control of the Self alone.

Fickle and unquiet—Fickleness and restlessness are the natural characteristics of the mind in its impure state.

Whatever causes it etc.—Sound, smell, and other objects are responsible for the mind's wandering away.

The means of bringing under control the restless mind are the realization of the illusoriness of sense-objects and the cultivation of indifference to them. Through the practice of discrimination and detachment the mind gradually attains inner peace.

The result of the yoga of meditation:

27

Supreme Bliss comes to the yogi whose mind is completely tranquil and whose passions are quieted, who is free from stain and who has become one with Brahman.

Passions—All passions, including delusion and attachment.

Free from stain—Unaffected by the illusion of dharma and adharma.

One with Brahman—A jivanmukta, liberated while living in a body.

The purpose of yoga is achieved.

28

Thus making his self ever steadfast, the yogi, freed from sins, easily enjoys the touch of Brahman, which is exceeding bliss.

The bliss that is derived from contact with Brahman is infinite.

The result of the realization of oneness with Brahman:

29

With the heart concentrated by yoga, viewing all things with equal regard, he beholds himself in all beings and all beings in himself.

Viewing all things etc.—Seeing the same Spirit dwelling in all objects.

He sees the identity of Ātman, the inmost Reality of himself, and Brahman, the inmost Reality of the universe.

30

He who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me, to him I am never lost, nor is he ever lost to Me.

After realizing his unity with Brahman, the yogi never loses his awareness of It. The Self of the yogi and the Self of Brahman have become one.

The result of this Knowledge is moksha, or liberation.

31

He who, having been established in oneness, worships Me dwelling in all beings—that yogi, in whatever way he leads his life, lives in Me.

In all beings—The Lord dwells in all beings as their inmost Self, irrespective of their outer forms.

The yogi who sees the Lord in all beings and worships Him through all beings has attained liberation. No matter how he lives and acts, he is always free. He is no longer under the control of scriptural injunctions.

The best among the yogis is he who is compassionate to all beings.

32

Him I hold to be the supreme yogi, O Arjuna, who looks on the pleasure and pain of all beings as he looks on them in himself.

This verse is the golden rule of Hinduism. The highest yogi sees that whatever is pleasant to him is pleasant to all others, including subhuman beings, and that whatever is painful to him is painful to all others. Therefore he cannot cause pain to any. He leads a life of complete non-violence. The highest yogi is he who is devoted to right knowledge and who, in action, is harmless to all.

Arjuna thinks that such a state of yoga is hard to attain. He asks Krishna the method of its realization:

33

Arjuna said: This yoga, which You, O Madhusudana,

have declared to be characterized by evenness—I do not see how it can long endure, because of the restlessness of the mind.

Evenness—The mind, free from torpidity and restlessness, becomes one with the Self.

34

For the mind, O Krishna, is restless, turbulent, powerful, and obstinate. To control it is as hard, it seems to me, as to control the wind.

Krishna—The word is derived from the root "krish," which mean "to scrape." Krishna is so called because He scrapes or draws away all sins from His devotees.

Turbulent—It agitates the body and senses and brings them under the control of objects.

Powerful—The mind cannot be easily subdued by reasoning.

The Lord indicates the way to control the mind:

35

The Lord said: Doubtless, O mighty Arjuna, the mind is restless and hard to control; but by practice and by detachment, O son of Kunti, it can be restrained.

Practice—The effort of the mind toward calmness. Practice becomes firmly grounded when it is followed for a long time, and unremittingly, with devotion. The end is easily achieved with the help of austerity, continence, discrimination, and faith. The aspirant must not lose courage in the face of repeated failures.

Detachment—Freedom from thirst for any pleasure seen or heard of. It is acquired through a constant perception of evil in all sensuous happiness, either of this life or hereafter.

Who can succeed in yoga?

36

Yoga is hard to attain, I think, by a man who cannot control himself; but it can be attained by him who has controlled himself and who strives by right means.

Who has controlled himself—By means of constant practice and detachment.

Yoga is the science of religion. The test of its validity lies in one's seeing results through actual experimentation. Hence the teachers of yoga emphasize self-control and other disciplines.

While practising yoga, a man renounces all worldly endeavours. He also gives up those meritorious actions that bring happiness in heaven. But suppose he slips from the path and dies without attaining Knowledge. Arjuna is afraid that such a man is lost both to yoga and to the world.

37

Arjuna said: A man who is endowed with faith, but not with steadfastness, and whose mind has wandered away from yoga—what end does he gain, O Krishna, having failed to obtain perfection in yoga?

Faith—In the efficacy of yoga.

Has wandered away from yoga—Before his death. During the last moments of his life he is unable to commune with the Self through yoga.

Does he attain neither heaven nor liberation?

38

Fallen from both, unsupported, and bewildered in the way leading to Brahman, does he not, O mighty Krishna, perish like a riven cloud?

Both—Both the path of worldly success and the path of yoga.

Unsupported—Without support either in material enjoyment or in yoga.

Riven cloud—A patch of cloud that has detached itself from a big cloud in order to reach a second big cloud, but, unable to reach its destination, drifts and ultimately disappears.

Only Krishna, the omniscient Lord, can remove such a doubt.

39

You should completely dispel, O Krishna, this doubt of mine; for no one but You can destroy such a doubt.

The reassurance of the Lord regarding His devotees:

40

The Lord said: O Pārtha, there is no destruction for him either in this world or the next: no evil, My son, befalls a man who does good.

No destruction—A yogi who falls from the path will not have a lower birth in his next life.

My son—A disciple is looked upon as a son.

A man who does good—That is to say, who strives for Self-realization.

What, then, will happen to him?

41

The man who has fallen away from yoga goes to the worlds of the righteous. Having lived there for unnumbered years, he is reborn in the home of the pure and the prosperous.

The worlds of the righteous—The worlds inhabited by those pious souls who have performed great religious sacrifices while living on this earth.

Unnumbered years—As long as the merit of his past spiritual life remains.

Pure—Whose conduct is governed by religion.

42

Or he is born in a family of yogis rich in wisdom. Verily, such a birth is hard to gain in this world.

A family of yogis etc.—Poor in material resources but rich in wisdom.

Hard to gain—A birth in a family of wise yogis is more difficult to obtain than the one mentioned in the preceding text.

The reward mentioned in the preceding text is enjoyed by a yogi of lesser merit.

43

There he comes in touch with the knowledge acquired in his former body, O son of the Kurus, and strives still further for perfection.

Knowledge—The spiritual knowledge he attained in his previous life, which accompanies him, as subconscious impressions, in this life.

Whatever progress a man makes in the path of yoga he retains. He again starts from there when the next opportunity comes.

44

By that former practice alone he is led on in spite of himself. Even he who merely wishes to know of yoga rises superior to the performer of Vedic rites.

Former practice—The practice in his former life.

Is led on in spite of himself—He may be unaware of the

spiritual tendencies from his previous life, or he may be averse to leading a spiritual life owing to the interference of past unfavourable karma; but this ignorance and aversion are swept away by the force of good tendencies of his former life, and he is borne on to the goal of Self-realization in spite of himself.

Rises superior—The realization of a man who merely inquires about Self-knowledge transcends the results of the sacrifices and other rituals extolled in the Vedas. Therefore what doubt can there be of the ultimate liberation of the aspirant who practises yoga with steady devotion?

45

A yogi, striving diligently, is purified of all sins, and, becoming perfect through many births, reaches the Supreme Goal.

Striving diligently—In every succeeding birth he adds a little more to his knowledge of yoga.

Becoming perfect etc.—Little by little acquiring, through many births, the knowledge of Reality, he ultimately attains perfection.

46

The yogi is greater than men of austerities, greater than men of knowledge, greater than men of action. Therefore be a yogi, O Arjuna.

Austerities—Mortification of the flesh, and the penances prescribed for the expiation of sin.

Knowledge—Of the teachings of the scriptures.

Action—Fire-sacrifice and other rituals enjoined in the Vedas; also philanthropic activities.

Through austerities, study, Vedic rituals, and philanthropic action, one attains purity of heart and then follows the path of Self-knowledge. But the practice of yoga enables one to arrive directly at the Supreme Goal.

47

And of all yogis, the one who worships Me with faith, his inmost self abiding in Me—him do I hold to be the most closely united with Me in yoga.

There are yogis who worship lesser deities. There are, again, those who are devoted to various austere practices in order to attain self-control. Sri Krishna here extols the yogi who loves God with all his heart and soul. Love of God is the easiest and best form of yoga. The sixth chapter ends with a note of emphasis on the path of bhakti (devotion).

Thus in the Bhagavad Gītā, the Essence of the Upanishads, the Science of Brahman, the Scripture of Yoga, the Dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna, ends the Sixth Chapter, entitled:

THE WAY OF MEDITATION

Chapter Seven

THE WAY OF REALIZATION

1

The Lord said: Hear, O Pārtha, how, with your mind attached to Me, and taking refuge in Me, and practising yoga, you will without any doubt know Me in full.

With your mind attached to Me—A man performs a Vedic sacrifice, practises austerities, or makes a gift, in order to obtain a worldly end. But a yogi's mind is attached to the Lord alone. So he sets aside all other disciplines and worships the Lord with complete concentration.

Taking refuge in Me—The Lord alone is the whole basis of the yogi's being and the goal of his action.

Practising yoga—Being united with the Lord in contemplation.

In full—The six attributes generally associated with the Lord are infinite Greatness, Strength, Power, Grace, Knowledge, and Detachment.

Sri Krishna ended the sixth chapter by describing the supreme yogi as one who, with his inmost self abiding in Him, adores the Lord. Arjuna will now be taught the nature of the Lord Himself, who is the object of the yogi's unwavering devotion.

The Knowledge of the Lord is extolled:

2

I shall teach you in full both knowledge and experience, which being known, nothing more remains here for you to know.

Knowledge and experience—The awareness that the Lord exists and that He is the inmost Spirit of all is knowledge. One acquires this knowledge through study of the scriptures and reasoning about their contents. But to realize the Lord in oneself and in all beings and to act according to that realization is experience, vijnāna. To give an illustration: To know that one can obtain fire from wood is knowledge; but to kindle wood and cook one's meal on the fire and be nourished by that meal is experience, vijnāna. The Knowledge of God, in Hindu philosophy, is inseparable from experience.

Nothing more remains etc.—The implication is that the Lord is everything; therefore when He is fully known everything is known. The Lord, as Satchidānanda (Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute), forms the real essence of all objects; names and forms are illusory superimpositions.

This integral knowledge of the Lord is a rare and difficult thing.

3

Among thousands of men, one, here and there, strives for perfection; and of those who strive and succeed, one, perchance, knows Me in truth.

In truth—The Being of the Lord and His diverse manifestations are indeed incomprehensible to the human mind. He is the Impersonal Reality, the Personal God, and many other things besides.

According to the Hindu scriptures, only a soul born in a human body is able to realize the Lord. Subhuman beings and superhuman beings (such as gods and angels) only experience the results of the actions performed by them as human beings in previous births. The consciousness that acts as instinct in subhuman beings manifests itself as reason in man. Of all living beings on earth, man alone can inquire about his self and its relationship with the Lord. Among innumerable human beings, only a few, comparatively speak-

ing, develop a desire for such an inquiry. Among those who show such desire, only a few, again, know the means of attaining knowledge and strive after it. Again, among those who strive, only a fortunate few succeed in acquiring the true knowledge of the Lord. Hence the knowledge of God is rare on this earth.

Sri Krishna describes the nature of the Lord:

4

Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, reason, and ego: such is the eightfold division of My Nature.

This eightfold division is taken from Sāmkhya philosophy. Mind (manas), referred to in the text, stands for ahamkāra, or I-consciousness, of Sāmkhya philosophy; reason (buddhi), for mahat (cosmic mind), which is the cause of ahamkāra; and ego (ahamkāra), for avyakta, or the unmanifest (the seed state of the manifest universe). These eight—the five elements, I-consciousness, mahat, and the unmanifest—constitute the Prakriti, or Nature, of Sāmkhya philosophy. The elements are of two kinds: subtle or rudimentary, and gross. Each of the subtle elements is endowed with a property of its own. Ether (ākāśa) has the property of producing sound; air (vāyu), the property of producing touch; fire (agni), the property of producing visibility; water (ap), the property of producing flavour; and earth (bhumi), the property of producing smell. These are the five ways in which a man, through his five sense-organs, becomes aware of Nature, or matter. Hence the Hindu philosophers have divided matter into five elements. Manas (the inner organ that creates doubt), buddhi (the inner organ that decides), and I-consciousness also belong to the realm of matter, or Prakriti. The gross elements are formed by a peculiar combination of the subtle elements, in which one half of each of the subtle elements combines with one eighth of the remaining four elements. Thus gross ether $= \frac{1}{2}$ subtle ether $+ \frac{1}{8}$ air $+ \frac{1}{8}$ fire $+ \frac{1}{8}$

water + $\frac{1}{8}$ earth. From ether is produced air. From air, containing the element of ether, is produced fire. From fire, containing the elements of ether and air, is produced water. From water, containing the elements of ether, air, and fire, is produced earth. Earth contains, besides its own subtle element, something of the four preceding entities. Since air springs from ether, it has the properties of both sound and touch. Each of the succeeding elements possesses, besides its own property, the properties of the preceding elements. Earth, for example, has the properties of smell (which is its own), flavour, visibility, touch, and sound.

The other category of Sāmkhya philosophy, besides Prakriti, or Nature, is Purusha, or Soul. Sāmkhya philosophy believes in a multiplicity of souls. Each living being has its own soul. According to the Non-dualistic Vedānta, Brahman is the only Reality. Under the influence of Its own māyā, Brahman appears as the different elements, gross and subtle, which supply the material cause of the universe and its created beings.

The manifestation of the Lord described above is of the nature of matter and therefore inferior, impure, and harmful. It constitutes the bondage of samsāra. There is a higher manifestation of the Lord, which is now revealed:

5

This is My lower nature. But, different from it, know, O mighty Arjuna, My higher nature—the Indwelling Spirit by which the universe is sustained.

According to the Upanishad, the Lord created the different forms and then entered them as their living souls. Insentient matter is sustained by the living Spirit. Contemplating matter, the soul becomes entangled in the world; contemplating the Spirit, it attains liberation. Hence the Spirit-form of the Lord is superior to His matter-form.

The omniscient Lord, through His two natures, is the cause of the entire universe.

6

Know that these two form the womb of all beings. I am the origin of the entire universe and also its dissolution.

These two—The lower and the higher nature, or Prakriti.

The womb—That is to say, the cause. The lower nature manifests itself as the material body, and the higher nature as the living soul, the experiencer.

I am the origin etc.—At the time of evolution names, forms, and life arise from Prakriti, and at the time of involution they go back into it. But Prakriti, independent of the Lord, cannot create. It is His instrument of creation, preservation, and dissolution. Hence the Lord is the Ultimate Cause of the universe.

Therefore,

7

There exists nothing whatever higher than I am, O Dhananjaya. All is strung on Me as a row of gems on a thread.

There exists nothing etc.—There exists no other cause of the universe except the Lord.

All—The universe and the created beings.

Row of gems etc.—The Lord is the support of the universe, as the string is of the gems on a necklace. Without the string the gems will lie scattered; without the Lord, the planets, stars, and all else will be dispersed. The Lord, manifesting Himself through the physical and moral laws, sustains the relative world. He is also the Unity that underlies the diversity of names and forms.

The Lord is also the essence of the universe.

8

I am the savour of waters, O son of Kunti, the radiance of the sun and moon; I am the syllable Om in all the Vedas, the sound in ether, the manliness in man.

Savour—This is the essence of water. See note on VII, 4.

Om—Om is the most sacred word of the Vedas and may be compared to the Word referred to by St. John in the opening of the Fourth Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." According to Hindu philosophy, the whole of this universe has both name and form (nāmarupa) as the prerequisite of its manifestation. The form is its outer crust, of which the name or idea is the inner essence or kernel. The name is inseparable from a word or sound. The universe perceived by the five senses is the form, behind which stands the eternal, inexpressible *sphota,* or Word, or Logos. This eternal *sphota,* the essential, beginningless material of all ideas or names, is the power through which the Lord creates the universe; nay, the Lord first becomes conditioned as the *sphota* by His own māyā, and then evolves Himself as the more concrete sense-perceived universe. The symbol of the *sphota* is Om, also written *Aum.* Since the word is inseparable from the idea, Om and the eternal *sphota* are inseparable. Therefore the eternal Om is the mother or source of all names and forms and hence the holiest of all holy words. There may be other words to denote the eternal and inexpressible *sphota*; but the Hindus contend that Om is a unique word and uniquely apposite. The *sphota* is the material or foundation of all sounds or words, which are inseparable from names or ideas; yet it is not any definite, fully formed word. That is to say, if all the peculiarities that distinguish one word from another be removed, then what remains will be the *sphota,* or Om. Therefore Om is called the Nāda-Brahman, or Sound-Brahman. The three letters, *a, u,* and *m,* pronounced in combination as Om, are the generalized symbol

of all possible sounds. *A* is the root sound, the key, pronounced without the tongue's touching any part of the palate. It is the least differentiated of all sounds. Again, all articulate sounds are produced in the space between the root of the tongue and the lips—the throat sound is *a,* and *m* is the last sound. *U* represents the rolling forward of the impulse that begins at the root of the tongue and ends at the lips. If properly pronounced, Om will represent the whole gamut of sound-production; and no other word can do this. Therefore Om is the fittest symbol of the *sphota,* the Logos, the Word "which was at the beginning." As the *sphota,* being the finer aspect of the manifested universe, is nearer to the Lord and is indeed the first manifestation of His divine wisdom, Om is the true symbol of God.[1] It is the symbol of both the Personal God (in His aspect of Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer) and Impersonal Reality. *A, u,* and *m* represent creation, preservation, and destruction respectively. The elongated, undifferentiated, gong-like sound that comes at the end of the utterance of Om is the symbol of Impersonal and Transcendental Reality. This symbol Om was not created by any human reasoning, but was revealed to pure-souled mystics when, in meditation, their minds were attuned to the Highest. See note on XVII, 23.

Sound in ether—Ether, or ākāśa, is the first element to be evolved from Brahman at the time of creation. The property of the rudimentary ākāśa is sound. Therefore it is the essence of ākāśa.

Manliness in man—It is manliness that is the essential quality of a man.

The Lord exists in all beings as their essential quality. That which is real and essential in water is the Lord; and this is true of all objects and beings.

9

I am the sweet fragrance in earth and the bright-

[1] This interpretation of Om is taken from *Bhakti-Yoga* by Swami Vivekananda.

ness in fire. In all beings I am the life, and I am the austerity in ascetics.

Sweet fragrance in earth—The property of rudimentary earth is fragrance, which is sweet and agreeable before it combines with the other elements.

Brightness in fire—This is the essence of fire, by which it reveals all objects or heats them or burns them or illumines them.

In all beings etc.—The Lord is the Life without which no being can live or exist.

Austerity in ascetics—The power by which the ascetics endure all opposites, such as heat and cold, love and hate, pleasure and pain.

10

Know Me, O son of Prithā, to be the Eternal Seed of all things that exist; I am the intelligence of the intelligent and the daring of the brave.

Eternal Seed—Unlike an ordinary seed, which dies after bringing forth its sprout, the Lord, the Eternal Seed of all beings, still exists though the universe in course of time disappears.

Intelligence—The discriminative faculty of the mind.

11

I am the strength of the strong, free from longing and attachment. I am, O lord of the Bhāratas, the desire in all beings that is not contrary to dharma.

Strength of the strong—The strength that is free from longing and attachment and that sustains a man's body and mind in his effort to do his duties. It is not the strength that creates thirst in a worldly person to enjoy sensuous pleasures.

Longing—Kāma: thirst for objects not present to the senses.

Attachment—Rāga: love for the objects presented to the senses, in spite of the knowledge of their illusoriness.

Desire—For instance, the desire for as much of food and drink as is necessary for the sustenance of the body. Or the word may mean the desire for legitimate offspring.

12

And whatever things there be—of the nature of sattva, rajas, and tamas—know they are all from Me alone. I am not, however, in them; they are in Me.

Things—These include the different states of mind.

Sattva, rajas, or tamas—See note on "gunas," II, 45.

I am not etc.—These gunas constitute Prakriti, or Nature, which is the inferior manifestation of the Lord. Therefore the Lord is their ultimate cause. But the Lord is not, as in the case of worldly men, under the control of the gunas. The gunas, on the contrary, are subject to Him.

The universe and all its beings are in the Lord, but the Lord is not in them. The universe is only an appearance superimposed by illusion (māyā) on the Lord. It is like a mirage in the desert. From the standpoint of the onlooker, the illusory water exists in the desert; but the desert does not depend upon or exist in the mirage. Likewise the universe, apparently superimposed on the Lord, exists in the Lord, but the Lord is not in the universe. None of the properties of the universe touches the Lord, just as the water of the mirage cannot soak a single grain of the desert sand.

The world does not know the Lord, who by nature is eternal, pure, intelligent, and free; who is the Self of all beings; and who, through His grace, redeems all creatures from the unending chain of birth and death, caused by māyā.

13

Deluded by these threefold gunas constituting Nature, this whole world fails to recognize Me, who am above the gunas and immutable.

Deluded etc.—All beings are deluded by love, hatred, attachment, and the other characteristics of the gunas.

Recognize Me—Though the Lord is the inmost Self of all beings and the object of direct and immediate perception.

Above the gunas—The Lord, in His purest essence, is untouched by the gunas, which belong only to His Prakriti.

Immutable—Not subject to birth, death, or any other changes.

How can one overcome the inscrutable māyā of the Lord?

14

Verily, this divine māyā of Mine, consisting of the gunas, is hard to overcome. But those who take refuge in Me alone, shall cross over this māyā.

Divine—Inscrutable to human reason.

Hard to overcome—By self-effort if unaided by divine grace.

Take refuge in Me alone—Abandoning all dharmas, or duties, become devoted to God alone, who is the Lord of māyā and the inmost Self of every being. If a man's hands are firmly tied by a strong rope, he cannot free himself by his own efforts; someone else must remove his bonds. Likewise, an aspirant cannot get rid of māyā by his own efforts; for all his thinking, discrimination, and other activities pertain to the domain of māyā. The Lord cannot be realized by yoga, karma, discrimination, or any other means except His grace. Spiritual disciplines, with their background of I-consciousness, only convince the seeker of their futility as means to realize the Lord. Then the seeker practises complete self-surrender, which elicits the divine grace. The purpose of spiritual practices is the realization that the Lord cannot be attained through them. The divine māyā appears insurmountable to the egotist, but it is easily overcome by the humble devotee of the Lord. An elephant that challenges a swift river is swept away by its strong current, but an in-

significant minnow, approaching it with humility, goes up the rushing stream.

Shall cross over etc.—Shall be liberated from the bondage of māyā.

Māyā, a concept of Vedānta philosophy, explains the relative universe. According to the Non-dualistic Vedānta, Brahman is the only Reality. It alone exists. Its nature is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. It is birthless, deathless, eternal, and immortal. Brahman is beyond cause and effect. Hence, from the standpoint of Brahman, there is neither creation of the universe nor preservation nor destruction. But from the relative standpoint the *fact* of creation cannot be denied, though the *act* of creation cannot be proved. Vedānta, in order to interpret the universe, makes use of the concept of māyā, which is generally translated as "illusion," "ignorance," "nescience," and so on. Through ignorance we superimpose the characteristics of one object upon another, though the superimposed characteristics do not in any way change the substratum. Illusions such as seeing a snake in a rope, a mirage in the desert, and silver in sea-shells are often cited by the Vedāntists to prove this. As long as the perceiver is under the influence of illusion, the snake, the mirage, and the silver appear to be real. But they do not in any way affect the real nature of the rope, the desert, and the shells. Likewise, through illusion, or māyā, Brahman appears as the universe. The ideas of time, space, causality, name, and form are superimposed upon the Pure Consciousness. But they do not alter the nature of Brahman. This power of creating illusion is inherent in Brahman Itself and is unknown and unknowable to the human mind, which itself is a product of māyā. One cannot inquire into the cause of a dream as long as one is dreaming.

The following are some of the characteristics of māyā:

It is something positive, though intangible; it cannot be described as either being or non-being. It is positive because it is the source of the manifold universe. It is not of the nature of existence or being, because it does not exist when Truth is realized. Again, it is not non-existent or non-being

(like the son of a barren woman), for it produces the illusion of the relative world.

Māyā is intangible: it cannot be grasped by reason, for reasoning itself is in māyā. To try to prove māyā by reasoning is like trying to see darkness by means of darkness. Again, māyā cannot be proved by Knowledge, for when Knowledge is awakened there remains no trace of māyā. Hence it will remain for ever inscrutable to the human mind.

Māyā consists of the three gunas: sattva, rajas, and tamas. They constitute māyā and are present in everything that exists in Nature.

Māyā is beginningless, for the very conception of time is due to māyā. But it has an end. The Knowledge of Brahman ends it.

Under the influence of māyā the Self, which is the same as the immortal Brahman, regards Itself as an embodied being and experiences the suffering and misery of the world. With the help of māyā, but retaining control of it, Brahman appears as an Avatār, or Incarnation, in order to subdue the power of iniquity and establish righteousness. The goal of spiritual discipline is to get rid of māyā and realize one's divine nature.

If through the worship of the Lord one gets rid of māyā, why do not all worship Him?

15

Evil-doers and the deluded and the vilest among men, deprived of knowledge by māyā and following the way of the asuras, do not worship Me.

Way of the asuras—The conduct of the demons; that is to say, cruelty, untruth, and the like. The traits of the asuras, or demoniacal person, are described in the sixteenth chapter of the Gītā.

It must not be thought that the Lord has created some persons with evil tendencies in order to punish them. He is

impartial—without any attachment or hatred for any created being. Only those whose sins, the result of their own evil action, have been destroyed feel His attraction. As a magnet exercises uniform attraction, He attracts all beings to Him. When the dirt of wickedness covering our soul is washed away by the tears of divine love, we become united with the Lord. Every soul will eventually realize God.

Only fortunate souls worship God.

16

Four types of virtuous men worship Me, O Arjuna: the man in distress, the man seeking knowledge, the man seeking enjoyment, and, O best of the Bhāratas, the man endowed with wisdom.

Virtuous men—Anyone seeking the Lord, whatever his motive, is a fortunate and righteous soul.

The man seeking knowledge—Wishing to learn Self-knowledge, or the Knowledge of God.

Enjoyment—Both here and hereafter.

The man endowed with wisdom—One who has renounced all desires born of māyā.

Not all people in distress or seeking knowledge and enjoyment worship the Lord. Only the fortunate among them take refuge in Him for the fulfilment of their desires.

Among the four types described above, the man of wisdom is the best.

17

Of these, the wise man, ever steadfast and devoted to the One alone, is the best. For supremely dear am I to the man of wisdom, and he is dear to Me.

Devoted to the One—The jnāni sees no one except the Lord Himself as the object of devotion. Since he does not

identify himself with the body, ego, and the rest, he does not experience any mental distraction; so his devotion to the Lord is one-pointed and unswerving.

Supremely dear am I etc.—The wise man knows the Lord to be his very Self. Therefore the Lord is very dear to him. It is well known that everyone loves the self most dearly. The Lord, too, considers the wise man to be His very Self and therefore His beloved.

Are the three others likewise dear to the Lord?

18

Noble indeed are they all; but the man endowed with wisdom I deem to be My very Self. For, steadfast in mind, he remains fixed in Me alone as the Supreme Goal.

Noble indeed etc.—The three others, who have motives behind their worship, are also dear to the Lord. The Lord always loves His devotees, whether their devotion to Him is selfish or unselfish.

My very Self—The Lord is the indwelling Self of all; but the *jnāni* alone is aware of it.

Compared to unbelievers, the devotees who worship the Lord for selfish purposes are noble, for their minds are directed to Him. But those who love the Lord alone as the Supreme Goal and whose love is untainted by any selfish desire are the best of devotees.

Rare indeed is the man endowed with divine wisdom.

19

At the end of many births the man of wisdom seeks refuge in Me, realizing that Vāsudeva is all. Rare indeed is such a high-souled person.

At the end etc.—After many lives spent in spiritual discipline one attains maturity of knowledge and obtains the direct vision of the Lord.

Vāsudeva—An epithet of the Lord, who is also the inmost Self of all beings.

All—The whole universe with its sentient and insentient beings.

Why do all not realize that the Lord alone is everything?

20

But those whose discrimination has been led astray by various desires resort to other deities, following diverse rituals, constrained by their own natures.

Various desires—For offspring, wealth, heaven, the defeat of enemies, and so on.

Other deities—Imperfect forms of the Lord, which correspond to their selfish desires.

Diverse rituals—Rites peculiar to the worship of such minor deities.

Own natures—Tendencies acquired in previous lives. On account of these tendencies they see the highest good in a petty ideal.

The Lord helps those, too, who worship other deities.

21

Whatever may be the form a devotee seeks to worship with faith—in that form alone I make his faith unwavering.

Form—All deities are only minor forms of the all-pervading Supreme Lord.

Faith—Faith alone brings success in worship.

The deepening of the devotee's faith in every form of worship comes only from the Lord. Through this intense

faith the devotee obtains the result of his worship, even though he has set before himself a limited goal. It is the Lord alone who bestows the fruit of worship.

22

Possessed of that faith, he worships that form and from it attains his desires, which are, in reality, granted by Me alone.

Faith—Deepened by the grace of the Lord on account of the devotee's earnestness.

Granted by Me alone—The Supreme and Omniscient Lord alone knows the precise relationship between an action and its fruit. He is the dispenser of the fruit of action.

Different are the results of the worship of the minor deities and the worship of the Supreme Lord.

23

But finite is the result gained by these men of small minds. Those who worship the deities go to the deities; those who worship Me come to Me.

Finite is the result etc.—Any enjoyment in the world of time and space comes to an end.

Men of small minds—Because they take a petty object as the Supreme Goal.

Deities—The deities are the manifestations of the Lord in the relative world.

Come to Me—Realize the transcendental and eternal aspect of the Spirit.

The same exertion is needed for the worship either of the Lord or of the minor deities; but the results are totally different. Yet men, deluded by transitory desires, do not seek the Lord Himself, who is the source of all peace, happiness, and knowledge.

If the worship of the Lord and of the minor deities require the same exertion but produce totally different results, why do seekers neglect the Lord and worship the deities?

24

Not knowing My supreme Nature, immutable and transcendent, foolish men think that I, the Unmanifest, am endowed with a manifest form.

The ignorant think that the Lord, too, like an ordinary mortal, comes down from the unmanifested state and assumes a body, impelled by His past karma. This belief is due to their ignorance of His real Nature, which is unchanging and ever luminous. Thus disregarding the Lord, the foolish worship the minor deities for the fulfilment of their selfish desires.

What is the cause of this ignorance?

25

Veiled by My māyā born of the gunas, I am not revealed to all. This deluded world knows Me not as the unborn and eternal.

Māyā—Māyā, which conceals the real nature of the Lord, belongs to the Lord Himself. Keeping this māyā under His Control, the Supreme Lord appears as Krishna and the other Incarnations. See pp. 187-188.

All embodiments are due to māyā. Ordinary mortals are under the control of māyā; therefore they cannot know their true divine nature. But in the case of the Incarnation, the all-powerful māyā is under His control; therefore He is never unaware of His own nature. Ignorant persons do not recognize an Incarnation of God, on account of the veil of māyā, but regard Him as an ordinary man.

Māyā, which limits the knowledge of men, cannot obstruct the Lord's knowledge.

26

I, O Arjuna, know the beings that are of the past, that are of the present, and that are to come; but Me no one knows.

I know—Because māyā is under the control of the Lord.

What is the obstacle to their knowledge, by which mortals are deluded and remain ignorant of the Lord?

27

All beings, from their very birth, O Bhārata, are deluded by the spell of the pairs of opposites arising from desire and aversion.

Pairs of opposites—See note on II, 45.

Those who are deluded by the passions of love and hate and the other pairs of opposites cannot even acquire a proper knowledge of the outer world. That the knowledge of the inmost Self is impossible for them goes without saying. Being under the spell of illusion from their birth, ignorant men do not know that the Lord is their Self.

Who are the fortunate souls free from the pairs of opposites and devoted to the worship of the Lord?

28

But the men of virtuous deeds, whose sin is ended, are free from the delusion of the pairs and worship Me with firm resolve.

Virtuous deeds—Which purify the mind.

Firm resolve—Seekers endowed with a pure mind are firm in their conviction that the Lord alone is real; they renounce everything else and devote themselves to the worship of the Lord.

Through the virtuous deeds of many lives one's sins are destroyed and the delusion of duality gradually disappears. As the mind becomes purer, one acquires concentration, firmness of resolve, and love of the Lord.

Through worshipping Me they acquire knowledge and attain the goal of life.

29

Those who take refuge in Me to gain release from old age and death—they will come to know Brahman, they will come to know all about the individual soul, and all about action as well.

Take refuge in Me—Devoted only to the Lord, whose nature is immortal.

Release from old age etc.—That is to say, liberation from relative existence. Their worship is not motivated by any earthly desire.

Individual soul—The Divinity that is the reality underlying the individual soul.

30

Those who know Me as the One that underlies all the elements, as the One that underlies all the gods, and as the One that sustains all the sacrifices, will, with steadfast mind, know Me even in the hour of death.

Their consciousness of the Lord will remain undiminished even in the hour of death. The practice of the knowledge of God throughout life enables one to remember Him in the hour of death. If one gives up the body with the knowledge of God, one attains liberation.

Thus in the Bhagavad Gītā, the Essence of the Upanishads, the Science of Brahman, the Scripture of Yoga, the Dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna, ends the Seventh Chapter, entitled:

THE WAY OF REALIZATION

Chapter Eight

THE WAY TO THE IMPERISHABLE BRAHMAN

1-2

Arjuna said: What is Brahman? What is the individual soul? And what is action, O Supreme Person? What is it that is said to underlie all the elements?

And what is it that is said to underlie all the gods? And who, O Madhusudana, sustains all the sacrifices here in the body? And in what way? And how, again, are You to be known at the time of death by those who have practised self-control?

Arjuna seeks the explanation of certain terms used by Krishna at the end of the seventh chapter.

3

The Lord said: Brahman is the Imperishable, the Supreme. Dwelling in each body, Brahman is called the individual soul. The offering of the oblation, which brings into existence all beings and supports them, is called action.

Brahman—Compare: "At the command of this Imperishable, O Gārgi, heaven and earth are held in their proper places." (*Brihadāranyaka Upanishad,* III, viii, 9)

Dwelling in each body—The Supreme Brahman alone exists in every individual body as the Pratyagātman, the Ego, the inmost Self, and is known as the Adhyātma. As the culmination of the spiritual discipline, this inmost Self is realized as one with Brahman.

Individual soul—The word used in the text is "Adhyātma."

The offering etc.—According to the Vedas, the offering of oblations to the gods brings about the births of all creatures: the oblations cause rain, and the rain causes food, and food causes created beings. The offering of oblations in sacrifice is called karma, or action.

4

That which underlies all the elements is the perishable entity; and that which underlies all the gods is the Purusha, the Cosmic Spirit. And He who sustains all the sacrifices is Myself, here in the body, O best of men.

That which underlies all the elements—It comprises all material objects, everything that comes into existence. The word used in the text is "adhibhuta."

That which underlies all the gods—The word used in the text is "adhidaivata."

Purusha—*Lit.*, That by which everything is filled, or That which lies in the body. It is the Cosmic Spirit (Hiranyagarbha), or Universal Soul, that manifests Itself as the controlling Deity of the sun and also as the consciousness that functions through the eyes and other sense-organs.

He who sustains etc.—The Vedas describe Vishnu as the presiding Deity of all sacrifices, as the dispenser of their fruits, and also as identified with them. Sri Krishna is an Incarnation of Vishnu. As the Inner Controller (Antaryāmi) of the body, He is the presiding Deity directing the various physical functions, which are described as acts of sacrifice. Though He rests in the body, yet He is not attached to it and is completely different from the senses. The word used in the text is "adhiyajna."

5

And whoso, at the time of death, leaves his body remembering Me alone and goes forth—he attains My Being; concerning this there is no doubt.

Me—That is to say, the Lord, who is the inmost Self of all beings.

The thought at the time of death determines the future of the soul.

6

For whatever object a man thinks of at the final moment, when he leaves his body—that alone does he attain, O son of Kunti, being ever absorbed in the thought thereof.

Object—Any particular deity or any other object.

The Hindu scriptures lay great stress on the thought and the state of mind at the time of death as determining the future of the soul. Thought is endowed with a self-creative power. Our inner being changes into that of which we insistently think with faith and devotion. We become that on which we keep our minds fixed and to which we constantly aspire. The ever recurring thought of a life-time, whether good or bad, presents itself vividly at the time of death. We cannot get rid of it, as the sleeping man cannot get rid of his dream. Since the character of the body next to be attained is determined by what a man thinks intensely at the time of death, he should always think of God if he wants to attain Him after leaving the body. This idea of the Gitā is not analogous to the indulgences and facilities of popular religion. The absolution and last unction of the priest does not make death edifying and spiritual after an unedifying and profane life. Even while the priest performs his rites, the dying man may be cherishing in his mind the thought in which he has indulged all through life.

Because the thought of a life-time is remembered at the time of death,

7

Therefore, at all times, constantly remember Me and fight. With your mind and understanding absorbed in Me, you will surely come to Me.

Fight—For the purification of the mind. The mind is purified when a man performs his own dharma, regarding himself as an instrument of God. Only a pure mind can constantly remember God. Arjuna is a kshatriya. His duty is to fight to uphold righteousness.

Constant practice is the effective discipline for the realization of the Lord.

8

Engaged in the yoga of constant practice and not allowing the mind to wander away to anything else, he who meditates on the supreme, resplendent Purusha reaches Him, O son of Prithā.

Practice—Consisting in the uninterrupted repetition of one and the same idea, with reference to the Lord as the sole object of meditation. Such practice, by which one's heart and soul are given to the Lord alone, is known as yoga.

Meditates—Following the instruction of the teacher and the scriptures.

Resplendent Purusha—The presiding Deity of the solar orb, who is the manifestation of the Absolute as the Cosmic Spirit. He is also known as the Saguna Brahman.

What sort of Purusha does a yogi realize?

9-10

He who, at the time of passing away, steady in mind, filled with love, and armed with the strength of yoga, well fixes his prāna between his brows and meditates on the omniscient and primal Being, the Ruler, the Dispenser of all, who is subtler than an atom, whose form is beyond comprehension, and who, like the glorious sun, is beyond all darkness—he who

thus meditates reaches the resplendent Supreme Person.

Armed with the strength of yoga—This is attained as a result of the constant practice of samādhi.

Well fixes etc.—A kind of prānāyama, or breath-control, described in the books on yoga.

Dispenser of all—Who allots to all living beings actions and their results in all their variety.

Glorious sun—He is glorious with the splendour of His eternal Intelligence.

Darkness—Māyā, or delusion.

The goal described here is Brahmaloka, the Abode of the Saguna Brahman, or Brahman with attributes. This Abode is the highest manifestation of Brahman in the relative plane. Subsequently, at the end of the cycle, the dwellers in Brahmaloka attain complete liberation.

Meditation on the Supreme Person through Om is described in verses 11-13:

11

I will now briefly describe to you that state which those who know the Vedas call the Imperishable, and into which enter the sannyāsis, self-controlled and freed from attachment, and in desire for which seekers lead the life of continence.

Imperishable—Devoid of all attributes. "This verily is That, the Imperishable, O Gārgi, which the brāhmanas declare as not gross, not subtle." (*Brihadāranyaka Upanishad,* III, viii, 8)

Continence—The reference is to the religious students known as brahmachāris, who live with their teacher, observing the vows of continence and celibacy and practising other spiritual disciplines.

The language of this verse is taken from the *Katha Upanishad,* I, ii, 15.

12-13

He who closes all the doors of the senses, confines the mind within the heart, draws the prāna into the head, and engages in the practice of yoga, uttering Om, the single syllable denoting Brahman, and meditates on Me—he who so departs, leaving the body, attains the Supreme Goal.

Confines the mind etc.—Concentrating the thought in the lotus of the heart, which is the seat of the Lord.

Draws the prāna etc.—By the practice of yoga.

Om—See note on VII, 8.

Leaving the body—The established yogic way of giving up the body.

Supreme Goal—The soul of the yogi goes to Brahmaloka.

Om has been declared in various verses of the Upanishads to be the symbol of both the Supreme Brahman and the Brahman with attributes. By meditating on Om the aspirant enjoys bliss in Brahmaloka and subsequently attains liberation in the Supreme Brahman. The dwellers in Brahmaloka are not subject to birth and death. Brahmā, a manifestation of Brahman in time and space, is the presiding Deity of Brahmaloka. He is the Creator God of Hindu mythology, Vishnu and Śiva being the Protector God and the Destroyer God respectively. (Regarding Brahmaloka, see note on VIII, 16.)

What kind of yogi easily attains the Lord?

14

I am easy of access to that ever steadfast yogi who, O Pārtha, constantly meditates on Me and gives no thought to anything else.

Therefore it is the duty of all men to contemplate the Lord without interruption.

What does the easy accessibility of the Lord do for a man?

15

Having come to Me, these high-souled men are no more subject to rebirth, which is transitory and the abode of pain; for they have reached the highest perfection.

Abode of pain—Pain of all kinds is inevitable in a human body.

Those who die without realizing the Lord come back again to earth. Life on earth, in spite of many moments of illusory happiness, is intrinsically painful. On account of their intense love of God, the devotees do not experience suffering on earth, and after death they attain Him.

From all planes in the relative universe people come back to the life on earth.

16

The dwellers in all the worlds, from the realm of Brahmā downward, are subject to rebirth, O Arjuna; but for those who reach Me, O son of Kunti, there is no further return to embodiment.

All the worlds—Because these worlds belong to the relative universe. They exist in time and space and are subject to the law of causation. They are impermanent.

Brahmaloka is the highest plane of existence in the relative universe. Its inhabitants enjoy intense happiness, which is their reward for leading a spiritual life on earth. But after the exhaustion of their meritorious deeds through

enjoyment, some of the dwellers in Brahmaloka, like those of other planes, return to the earth for rebirth. There is, however, one class of devotees who do not come back from Brahmaloka. They are those fortunate souls who do not cherish any worldly desire, but who, for some reason, have not attained supreme liberation in the human body. After death they follow the path of light and arrive in Brahmaloka. There they remain absorbed in contemplation of Brahman and attain final liberation at the end of the cycle, when the entire relative universe, with Brahmā, merges in Brahman.

Complete liberation, attended by the cessation of birth and death, is possible only for a man who has realized his identity with Brahman. All other worlds, whether subhuman or superhuman, are places of enjoyment where men, departing from this earth, experience the fruit of their action.

One can directly attain liberation through love of God alone, without having to wait for the dissolution of the universe.

People return to the earth from all planes, including Brahmaloka, on account of their being limited by time.

17

Those who know that the day of Brahmā lasts a thousand aeons, and that the night of Brahmā lasts a thousand aeons again, are indeed the people who know day and night.

Brahmā—The first manifestation of the Absolute in time and space; also known as Prajāpati and Virāj.

Are indeed etc.—Those who calculate day and night by the rising and setting of the sun have only a partial understanding of day and night.

According to Hindu mythology the world period is divided into four yugas (cycles or aeons): Satya, Tretā, Dwāpara, and Kali. The cycle of Satya abounds in virtue, vice being

practically non-existent. But with each succeeding age virtue diminishes and vice increases. The cycle of Kali is the reverse of Satya. The Satya Yuga endures for 1,728,000 years, the Tretā for 1,296,000 years, the Dwāpara for 864,000 years, and the Kali for 432,000 years. These four cycles, rotating a thousand times, make one day of Brahmā, and the same number of years one night. Fifteen such days make one fortnight of Brahmā, two fortnights one month, and twelve months one year. After living for one hundred years, Brahmā dies. Brahmā, too, like all other entities of the relative world, is impermanent and under the control of māyā. The longevity of Brahmā seems endless and fantastic from a man's restricted viewpoint, but it is momentary from the standpoint of the timeless and eternal Reality. The happiness associated with Brahmā, or the highest manifestation of Reality in the relative universe, is also momentary. The yogis, through their spiritual insight, see innumerable Brahmās arising and disappearing, like bubbles, in the Ocean of the Great Cause. Thus they do not feel any attachment even to the happiness of the highest heaven, how much less to that of earth.

What happens during Brahmā's day and night?

18

At the approach of the day all manifest objects come forth from the unmanifested, and at the approach of the night they merge again into that which is called the unmanifested.

Approach of the day—When Brahmā awakes.
All manifest objects—Both animate and inanimate.
Unmanifested—The sleep state of Brahmā.
Approach of the night—When Brahmā goes to sleep.

There is an eternal cycle of alternating periods of cosmic manifestation and non-manifestation, each period called respectively a day and a night of the Creator, Brahmā, each of equal length in time, the long aeon of His waking,

which endures for a thousand ages, the long aeon of His sleep, for another thousand silent ages. At the coming of the day all manifestations are born out of the unmanifest; at the coming of the night all disappear into the unmanifest.

The text describes the evolution and involution of the universe according to Hindu philosophy. Every period of evolution is preceded by one of involution. The process is eternal in the relative world. But the chain can be destroyed by the Knowledge of Brahman. Hinduism does not believe in a creation preceded by the condition of absolute non-existence.

It may be contended that a man appearing at the beginning of a cycle reaps the fruit of action he has not done, or that a man of the previous cycle does not reap the fruit of action he has done. The following verse shows that individuality is not destroyed by the mere process of involution. The law of karma operates whether the universe is in a state of evolution or involution.

19

The same multitude of beings, coming forth again and again, merge, in spite of themselves, O Pārtha, at the approach of the night, and remanifest themselves at the approach of the day.

The same multitude etc.—Comprising the moving and the non-moving who existed in the preceding cycle or age, and who did not attain liberation.

Coming forth again and again etc.—Repeatedly they come forth and dissolve by the effect of their own karma.

In spite of themselves—The law of karma is inexorable.

In this world of māyā, all beings lead, as it were, a merry-go-round existence. There is no freedom as long as one is caught in the wheel of karma. The *Rig Veda* says that the sun, the moon, and the different worlds of the preceding cycle repeat themselves in the succeeding one. Therefore one should cultivate detachment and free oneself from māyā.

After describing the impermanence of the different worlds, Sri Krishma speaks of the eternal nature of the Supreme Lord.

20

But beyond this unmanifested there is yet another Unmanifested Eternal Being, who does not perish when all beings perish.

This unmanifested—The seed state of the whole multitude of created beings; the night of Brahmā.

Another—Of altogether different kind. It is supra-cosmic and beyond avidyā.

Unmanifested—Because imperceptible to the senses.

Eternal Being—The Imperishable Brahman.

Who does not perish—Because It is beyond time, space, and causality.

All beings—From Brahmā downwards.

21

This Unmanifested is called the Imperishable; It is said to be the Ultimate Goal, from which those who reach It never come back. That is My Supreme Abode.

Never come back—To the relative existence. The knower of Brahman never again falls under the spell of māyā, or ignorance.

Supreme Abode—The relative universe is the inferior manifestation of Brahman.

The Ultimate Goal referred to in the text does not indicate any state or condition, but the Imperishable Brahman Itself, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.

The means of attaining that Supreme Abode:

22

That Supreme Purusha, in whom all beings abide and by whom the entire universe is pervaded, can be

attained, O Pārtha, by whole-souled devotion directed to Him alone.

Purusha—Brahman is called Purusha, Person, because It dwells in every body (*pura*), or because It is full.

In whom all beings abide—Because He is the ultimate cause. The effect is included in the cause.

The entire universe is pervaded—The Lord pervades the whole universe like the fragrance pervading sandal-wood.

Whole-souled devotion etc.—Bhakti, or love of the Lord, is the same as knowledge of Him. It proceeds from the realization that nothing exists except the Lord.

The two paths that the yogis follow after death:

23

Now I will tell you, O greatest of the Bhāratas, the time in which the yogis depart never to return, and also the time in which they depart to return.

Yogis—Those who are engaged in meditation. This also includes the ritualists, who perform the sacrifices and other actions prescribed in the Vedas.

To return—To be reborn.

Verses 23-26 in the eighth chapter refer to the two paths described by the ancient Vedāntic mystics. They are known as the devayāna, or path of the gods, and the pitriyāna, or path of the fathers. Souls departing from this world follow these paths according to their merit. The path of the gods is associated with fire, light, day-time, the bright fortnight of the lunar month, and the northern solstice. The path of the fathers is associated with smoke, night, the dark fortnight of the lunar month, and the southern solstice. The path of the gods leads the departing souls to Brahmaloka, whence they do not come back to the earth for rebirth. They attain final freedom after the end of the cycle. The path of the fathers leads the departing souls to Chandraloka, or the sphere of the moon, where they enjoy great happiness on account of

the meritorious action performed by them on earth. After reaping the fruit, they come back to earth for rebirth to satisfy their unfulfilled desires. These paths have been dealt with in the Upanishads, prominently in the *Chhāndogya Upanishad,* V, x, 1-4, and also in the *Brahma-sutras,* IV, ii, 18-21.

The path of non-return:

24

Fire, light, day-time, the bright half of the moon, and the six months of the northward passage of the sun—taking this path, the knowers of Brahman go to Brahman.

Fire, light, etc.—According to Śankarāchārya each of the steps mentioned in the list means its presiding deity. Thus "fire" means the deity presiding over fire. According to the belief of the Vedic times every physical object, such as the sun, moon, and so on, is controlled by a deity who is a lower manifestation of the Supreme Brahman.

Knowers of Brahman—Here "Brahman" refers to the Saguna Brahman, or Brahman with attributes. It is distinguished from the Supreme Brahman, or Nirguna Brahman, that is to say, Brahman without any attribute.

Go to Brahman—That is to say, in course of time, after the completion of the cycle. The aspirants who have attained Self-knowledge obtain immediate liberation. For them neither return nor non-return has any meaning. They transcend time, space, and causality.

The text describes the "northern path." It is also known as the path of the gods, or the path of light, by which Brahmaloka is attained by yogis who worship Brahman through the symbol Om—as referred to in verses 8-13 of this chapter.

The *Chhāndogya Upanishad* (IV, xv, 5) thus describes the path of the gods:

"Now, such a one—whether his after-death rites are per-

formed or not—goes to light, from light to day, from day to the bright half of the month, from the bright half of the month to the six months during which the sun rises northward, from the months to the year, from the year to the sun, from the sun to the moon, from the moon to the lightning. Then he meets a person who is not a human being. This person carries the soul to Brahman. This is the divine path, the path of Brahman. Those proceeding by this path do not return to the whirl of humanity."

The path of return:

25

Smoke, night, the dark half of the moon, and the six months of the southward passage of the sun—taking this path, the yogi reaches the lunar path and thence returns.

Smoke, night, etc.—As in the previous verse, "smoke," "night," and so on denote the deities controlling these objects.

Yogi—Ritualists and those who perform philanthropic actions, desiring a reward.

Returns—To this earth after their enjoyment in the lunar sphere is over. This enjoyment is the result of their action on earth.

The Hindu scriptures often speak of the four courses that men may follow after death. These are determined by one's thought and action while on earth. First, the yogis who lead an extremely righteous life, meditate on Brahman, and follow the various disciplines of yoga, repair, after death, to Brahmaloka (roughly corresponding to the heaven of the Christians) and from there, in due course, attain salvation, known as kramamukti, or gradual emancipation. Second, the ritualists and the philanthropists, who cherish a desire for the fruit of their devotion and charity, repair, after death, to Chandraloka, or the lunar sphere. After enjoying there immense happiness as the fruit of their meritorious action, they come back to earth, since they still cherish desires for worldly happiness.

These are called gods or deities in Hinduism. Third, those who perform actions forbidden by religion assume, after death, subhuman bodies and dwell in what is generally known as hell. After expiating their evil actions, they are reborn on earth. Fourth, the persons who perform extremely vile actions spend many births as such insignificant beings as mosquitos and fleas.

The relative value of a created being depends on the degree of consciousness manifested by it. The consciousness manifested by the dweller in Brahmaloka is very high, and the consciousness manifested by the insects is very low. The man endowed with Self-knowledge attains liberation in this very life. His soul does not go to any sphere, for he has realized its identity with the all-pervading Consciousness. Different courses after death have been pointed out by the Hindu scriptures in order to warn people against neglecting Self-knowledge and to exhort them to realize Brahman, which alone is the source of eternal peace and happiness. According to the Hindu scriptures, all living beings, without any exception whatsoever, will attain Self-knowledge and liberation.

26

These two paths—the bright and the dark—are deemed to be the world's eternal paths. Following the one, a man does not come back, and following the other, he is reborn.

Bright—Because it is reached by means of knowledge and its course is marked throughout by bright objects.

Dark—Because avidyā, or ignorance, makes one follow it, and also because the path is marked throughout by smoke and other dark things.

Eternal—Because samsāra, or the universe, is eternal from the relative point of view.

Swami Vivekananda has an interesting theory of the universe and its various planes or spheres. All these spheres are products of matter and energy, or what Sāmkhya philosophy calls ākāśa and prāna, in varying degrees. The lowest or

most condensed is the solar sphere, consisting of the visible universe, in which prāna appears as physical force and ākāśa as sense-perceived matter. The next is the lunar sphere, which surrounds the solar sphere. This is not the moon at all, but the habitation of the gods. In this sphere prāna appears as the psychic forces and ākāśa as the tanmātrās, or fine, rudimentary elements. Beyond this is the electric sphere, that is to say, a condition in which prāna is almost inseparable from ākāśa; there one can hardly tell whether electricity is force or matter. Next is Brahmaloka, where prāna and ākāśa do not exist as separate entities; both are merged in the mind-stuff, the primal energy. In the absence of prāna and ākāśa, the jiva, or individual soul, contemplates the whole universe as the sum total of the cosmic mind. This appears as a purusha, an abstract universal soul, yet not the Absolute, for still there is multiplicity. From this sphere the jiva subsequently finds his way to Unity, which is the end and goal of his earthly evolution.

According to the Non-dualistic Vedānta these spheres are only visions that arise in succession before the Soul, which Itself neither comes nor goes. The sense-perceived world in which a man lives is a similar vision. At the time of dissolution these visions gradually disappear, the gross merging in the fine. The purpose of the Hindu philosophers in treating of cosmology is to awaken in man's heart a spirit of detachment from the relative universe.

The experience of happiness in different planes or spheres after death is transitory. The dwellers in those planes come back to earth and commence again their life of pain and suffering. Even the most fortunate dwellers in Brahmaloka must wait a long time before they attain complete liberation. On the other hand, Self-knowledge, which can be attained by every human being, confers upon its possessor liberation in this very life. He does not have to wait for a future time to taste the bliss of immortality. This attainment of liberation through Self-knowledge, while living in a physical body, is the goal of human life. The Hindu scriptures treat of the various cycles and planes and spheres, and also of the various courses open to the soul after death, in order to spur men to

strive for Self-knowledge and the attainment of liberation here on earth.

The results of following the two paths:

27

No yogi who understands these two paths is ever deluded. Therefore, O Arjuna, at all times be steadfast in yoga.

The wise yogi knows that, of the two paths, the one leads to samsāra and the other to moksha, or liberation. Therefore he rejects the former and takes up the latter.

The glory of yoga:

28

The yogi who knows this transcends all the rewards laid down for the study of the Vedas, for sacrifices, for austerities, for making gifts: he reaches the Supreme, Primal Abode.

This—The answers to the seven questions of Arjuna, given in the eighth chapter of the Gītā. One must not merely understand, but also follow, the teachings implied in the answers.

Thus in the Bhagavad Gītā, the Essence of the Upanishads, the Science of Brahman, the Scripture of Yoga, the Dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna, ends the Eighth Chapter, entitled:

THE WAY TO THE IMPERISHABLE BRAHMAN

Chapter Nine

THE WAY OF THE SOVEREIGN WISDOM AND SOVEREIGN MYSTERY

1

The Lord said: To you, O Arjuna, who do not carp, I will propound this, the greatest mystery of knowledge combined with realization, by understanding which you will be released from evil.

This—The Knowledge of Brahman, indicated by such scriptural passages as: "Vāsudeva is all," "All this is the Self," "One without a second." This Knowledge is the direct means of attaining liberation.

Greatest mystery—Dharma is a mystery; greater is the mystery of the self dwelling in the body; and the greatest mystery is the knowledge of the identity of the individual self and the Supreme Self.

Evil—The bondage of the world.

The eighth chapter of the Gītā has dealt with emancipation by stages through the process of meditation. But this indirect way is not the only means of emancipation. The direct way is described in the ninth chapter.

In praise of this knowledge:

2

It is the sovereign science, the sovereign mystery, and the supreme purifier. It is perceived by direct experience, it accords with dharma, it is easy to practise, and it is imperishable.

Sovereign science—Because of its majesty. Indeed, the science of Brahman is the most profound of all sciences.

Supreme purifier—As a lamp, when lighted in a room, instantly destroys the accumulated darkness of ages, so the Knowledge of Brahman, when realized in the heart, reduces to ashes, root and all, the accumulated karma of all the past lives.

Perceived by direct experience—The Bliss of Brahman is as directly perceived as the feeling of pleasure and pain.

Accords with dharma—An object endowed with many delectable qualities may be opposed to dharma; but such is not the case with the Knowledge of Brahman.

Easy to practise—Easily acquired when taught by a qualified teacher.

Imperishable—Generally it is seen that an action which requires little trouble and is easily accomplished produces an insignificant result. But the Knowledge of Brahman, though easily acquired, is quite the contrary. The Bliss of Brahman is eternal.

Therefore the Knowledge of Brahman should be pursued by all desiring real peace and happiness.

On account of their lack of faith, worldly beings do not pursue the Knowledge of Brahman.

3

Men without faith in this dharma do not attain Me, O dreaded Arjuna, but return to the path of the world fraught with death.

Without faith etc.—Who regard the physical body as the Self and do not believe in the indestructibility and immortality of the soul.

Faith, or an unswerving conviction of the existence of God, the soul, and immortality, is the prerequisite of spiritual life.

Sri Krishna formulates the sovereign wisdom:

4

By Me, in My unmanifested form, are all things in this universe pervaded. All beings exist in Me, but I do not exist in them.

Me—The Supreme Lord and the Ultimate Cause of all.

My unmanifested form—Consciousness, or Ātman, which is imperceptible to the senses.

All things in this universe—From the highest Brahmā, or the Cosmic Spirit, to a blade of grass.

Pervaded—Nothing can exist unless the Lord, or Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, forms its substratum. It is said in the Upanishads that the Lord, after creating objects, entered them as their indwelling Consciousness.

All beings exist in Me—Beings may be likened to a piece of cloth, and the Lord to the thread comprising its warp and woof. The cloth cannot exist without the warp and woof.

I do not exist in them—Because Brahman is incorporeal and hence unconnected with any object.

The two forms of the Lord, the manifested and the unmanifested, have been described in the seventh chapter of the Gītā (VII, 4-5). The illusory and unreal world appears to be real and tangible on account of the reality of the Lord forming its substratum. No change can be perceived without the background of changelessness. The illusion of a mirage is not seen without the background of the desert. The continuity in a moving picture cannot be perceived without the background of the unmoving screen; it is the fixed screen that makes the separate and disjoined pictures appear as a continuous story. Likewise, the presence of the Lord as the immutable Consciousness creates the appearance of continuity and history in an ever changing, illusory universe. If He, as Existence, did not form the basis of the universe, nothing would be perceived to exist. Therefore all existent entities are pervaded by the Lord's existence, which itself is imperceptible to the senses. A thing devoid of inner reality cannot

exist or be an object of experience. The Lord is the inner reality of everything. The reality of the Lord makes real everything in the world. But the reality of the Lord does not depend upon the world. He always exists, whether the universe of name and form exists or not. The Lord is incorporeal and therefore has no real contact with the material world. He cannot be contained in any object. He is self-existent and self-luminous. Only a fraction of His majesty illumines the sun, the moon, and the universe; but He Himself, in His purest essence, is transcendental.

5

And yet the beings do not dwell in Me—behold, that is My divine mystery. My Spirit, which is the support of all beings and the source of all things, does not dwell in them.

Do not dwell in Me—Because the Self is not attached to anything. "Devoid of attachment, He never enters into relationship with anything." (*Brihadāranyaka Upanishad*, III, ix, 26)

Divine mystery—The Lord is all-pervasive and yet free from contact with any object.

Support of all beings—As their inmost reality and essence.

Source of all things—Only from the relative standpoint. In reality the Lord is not the cause of anything, for nothing exists besides Him.

Does not dwell in them—Because the Lord is unconnected with any object on account of His incorporeal nature.

The infinite Lord cannot be contained in a finite universe. But why cannot the universe and its beings dwell in Him? The Lord, in reality, is neither the container nor the contained. In Him there is not the slightest trace of duality. In His purest essence He is above the law of cause and effect. In the final realization, the object and the subject become one; the whole universe merges in the Lord. In that state the Lord remains as One without a second, a homogeneous concentration of Consciousness. The concepts of container

and contained, cause and effect, apply to the realm of manifestation, or māyā. Even though the Lord manifests, through māyā, the tangible relative universe, and appears to be its cause and support, yet He is always One and without a second, transcendental, incorporeal, and unattached. This is His eternal mystery.

An illustration of the idea contained in the two preceding verses:

6

As the mighty wind blowing everywhere ever rests in the ākāśa, know that in the same manner all beings rest in Me.

Rests in the ākāśa—Without affecting the ākāśa in any way, because ākāśa is unattached to the wind.

Ākāśa—Ethereal space.

All beings rest in Me—Without affecting the Lord in any way. Good and evil, pain and pleasure, and the other traits of this great universe do not touch the Lord, because from His standpoint they are illusory, and also because He is entirely spiritual in nature. He can never be touched by anything happening in time and space. As a light cannot be affected by the good or evil deed done with its help, so the soul, which in its essence is one with the Lord, cannot be affected by the good and evil action of the body and mind.

Though the Lord is incorporeal and unattached, His māyā is the cause of the creation and dissolution of all beings.

7

At the end of a cycle all beings, O son of Kunti, enter into My Prakriti, and at the beginning of a cycle I generate them again.

My Prakriti—The inferior mode of the Lord, consisting of sattva, rajas, and tamas in their undifferentiated state.

Generate—Bring them forth, or manifest them, at the time of the next evolution.

The whole process of creation, preservation, and destruction is due to the Lord's māyā. He is unaffected by it. Vedānta philosophy recognizes the *fact* of creation (from the standpoint of māyā), but not the *act* of creation. The Lord, devoid of ego and motive, does not create. Creation implies unsatisfied desires. But as long as one is subject to māyā, one cannot deny the fact of creation. It is like our dreams. A dream cannot be denied as a fact as long as we dream. But, actually, we never become what we see in dreams. Māyā, or the inferior nature of the Lord, projects out of itself all the names and forms at the time of creation. Consciousness, or the higher nature of the Lord, endows them with life. At the end of the cycle the names and forms of the manifested universe go back into the seed state and remain merged in Prakriti, and Prakriti itself remains in a state of equilibrium of the three gunas. When the balance is lost, creation takes place. This process of creation and destruction is without beginning. Better terms to express creation and destruction, in agreement with the Hindu view, are manifestation or evolution, and mergence or involution. The Lord in His pure essence remains unaffected by the activities of His māyā, though the insentient māyā is actuated by His proximity. (For "māyā," see note on VII, 14.)

Sri Krishna anticipates the question: How does the Lord, who is immutable and detached, create the world?

8

Controlling My own Prakriti, I send forth, again and again, all this multitude of beings, helpless under the sway of māyā.

Controlling My own Prakriti—The Lord, with the help of Prakriti, manifests the universe. Because of His very proximity, insentient Nature acts. He is only a witness. Māyā, or

Prakriti, is under His control. But the jiva, or created being, is under the control of māyā.

Send forth—Living beings come out from Prakriti, which has gone to sleep at the end of the previous cycle. Dissolution, or the state in which the three gunas remain in perfect balance, is called the sleep of Prakriti.

Helpless etc.—The beings who, at the end of the previous cycle, merged in Prakriti are still under the influence of māyā, or ignorance. As Prakriti becomes active at the beginning of the next cycle, the beings also assume appropriate births according to their past karma.

The Lord, in His purest essence, is unattached. He does not create; for creation serves no purpose of His. In this universe, which is conjured up by māyā, all beings are governed by the law of karma. Since the creation is falsely superimposed upon the Lord, therefore what is perceived to be the universe existing in time and space is, from the standpoint of Reality, nothing but the Lord Himself. In the illusion of a rope appearing as a snake, the falsely perceived snake is, in reality, nothing but the rope.

It may be objected that the Lord, because He is responsible for the manifestation of diverse beings of unequal condition, is guilty of partiality and therefore subject to dharma and adharma arising from the creation. The answer follows:

9

And these acts, O Dhananjaya, do not bind Me; for I remain unattached to them, as one unconcerned.

These acts—Relating to the unequal creation of diverse beings.

Unattached to them—Because the Lord is conscious of the immutability of the Self. He is unconcerned about the fruit of action. It is attachment to the fruit that binds. He is unconcerned because He is totally devoid of the feeling "I do."

The creation belongs to the realm of māyā; the Lord is beyond māyā. There is no contact or relationship between the Lord and creation, as there is no contact between the desert and a mirage. He is totally free from any desire, purpose, motive, or agency so far as the creation is concerned.

A man devoid of egotism and attachment, like the Lord, is free from the binding effect of action. Anyone working as the Lord works enjoys unimpaired freedom. Otherwise he remains bound by his action, like a silk-worm in its cocoon.

There is an apparent contradiction in the two statements of the Lord that He generates all beings (IX, 7) *and that He is unconcerned about creation* (IX, 9). *It is thus resolved:*

10

Prakriti, under My guidance, gives birth to all things, moving and unmoving; and because of this, O son of Kunti, the world revolves.

Prakriti—Māyā, consisting of the three gunas.

Under My guidance—The Lord acting as the unconcerned witness.

Because of this etc.—All objects, moving and unmoving, wheel round and round because of the proximity of the Lord as Consciousness. All the activities in the world, expressed in such terms as "I shall enjoy," "I see," "I feel," "I shall gain," "I shall learn," and so on, are possible only because of consciousness. These ideas arise in consciousness. There is no other conscious being in the universe except the all-pervading Lord. Therefore the whole universe revolves in its course on account of the proximity of the Lord. Prakriti, or insentient Nature, cannot perform any conscious action.

It is absurd to ask the purpose of creation. The enjoyment of the Lord surely cannot be the purpose; for He is devoid of desire and does not enjoy. He is Pure Consciousness and a disinterested witness. And there is no other enjoyer; for there is no other consciousness; none but a conscious being is

capable of enjoyment. The question regarding the purpose of creation cannot be asked if one remembers that creation is māyā, or an illusion.

The position of the Lord with reference to creation is explained in verses 7-9 by a method that gradually trains the student to grasp a subtle point. The Lord begins by stating that He projects all beings at the beginning of evolution: Prakriti is only an instrument in His hands. Next, He says He is not affected by that act, since He sits by as one neutral, perfectly unattached. Lastly, the Lord leads up to the final truth that really He does nothing and that Prakriti, animated by His proximity, produces the universe. It is His light that lights up Prakriti and makes it live and act. That is the only relationship between the Lord and His Prakriti.

The ignorant disregard the Lord, who is of the nature of eternity, purity, knowledge, and freedom, and who is the inmost Self of all beings.

11

Fools disregard Me when I assume a human form; for they are unaware of My higher nature as the Supreme Lord of all beings.

Disregard Me—As an ordinary human being.

From time to time the Lord assumes a human form so that men may attain a godly nature. In that state the Lord acts outwardly like a human being, though always remaining in full possession of the knowledge that He is unattached to any material thing and that He is the very Self of all beings. The deluded only see Him acting as a man and therefore disregard Him, as an ordinary human being.

Sri Krishna pities the ignorant, who worship other gods and not the Lord:

12

Being of the deceitful nature of fiends and demons, they cherish vain hopes, perform vain actions, pursue vain knowledge, and are devoid of judgement.

Fiends and demons—The word "rāksha" in the text denotes a fiend who indulges in deeds of cruelty, and the word "asura," a demon who is full of lust, passion, and pride.

Vain hopes—Because they expect that the worship of deities other than the Lord will bring them quick results in the form of material power and prosperity.

Vain actions—Their performance of sacrifices and observance of rituals are futile because they disregard the Lord, who dwells in them as their inmost Spirit.

Vain knowledge—Because they take delight in useless polemics.

Sri Krishna implies that if a man observes the rituals of religion, cherishes ambition, and cultivates scholarship, but denies the Lord, he does not derive any benefit from his labour.

The aspirants who cherish love for the Lord are extolled:

13

But the great-souled men, O Pārtha, who are endowed with the divine nature, worship Me with undisturbed minds, knowing that I am immutable and the origin of all beings.

Divine nature—Such as possession of faith and control of the mind, senses, and body.

All beings—Living creatures and inanimate elements.

Adoration of the Lord through love:

14

Ever glorifying Me, always striving with self-control, remaining firm in their vows, bowing before Me, they worship Me with love and unwavering steadiness.

Glorifying Me—With appropriate chants and hymns.

Bowing before Me—Before sacred images and holy men, because the manifestation of the Lord is very vivid in them.

Different modes of worship through the path of knowledge:

15

Others, again, offer the oblation of knowledge and worship Me either as one with them or as distinct from them; and still others in various ways worship Me, whose form is the whole universe.

Oblation of knowledge—The knowledge of the Lord is itself a sacrifice (yajna).

As one with them—The non-dualistic view.

Distinct from them—The dualistic view: The Lord exists in the forms of various deities; or the worshipper is different from the Lord, His servant.

Various ways—As various divinities, such as the sun, the wind, Brahmā, or Rudra.

The Lord is the inmost Self of everything; therefore all diverse forms of worship are in essence His worship.

16

I am the sacrifice, I am the worship, I am the oblation to the manes, and I am cereal. I am the hymn,

I am the melted butter, I am the fire, and I am the offering.

Sacrifice—The word "kratu" in the text denotes a class of Vedic rites.

Worship—The word "yajna" in the text denotes the worship enjoined in the smriti.

Cereal—Eaten by all living beings.

Hymn—With which oblations are offered to the manes and the gods.

Fire—Into which the oblation is made.

Through the symbol of a sacrifice the Lord suggests that He alone forms all the accessories of worship and also the act and the result of worship.

Furthermore,

17

I am the Father of this universe, the Mother, the Sustainer, and the Grandsire. I am the knowable, the purifier, and the syllable Om. I am also the Rik, the Sāman, and the Yajus.

Father—The efficient cause.

Mother—The material cause.

Sustainer—The dispenser of the fruits of action to different beings according to their merit. The Lord sustains the universe through the law of karma, which is the law of causality operating on the moral plane.

Grandsire—The subtle is the cause of the gross. The Lord is the cause of the subtle. He is the cause of both the manifest and the unmanifest. Hence He is called the Grandsire.

Knowable—By knowing the Lord one knows everything in the world; for He is the inmost essence of all.

Purifier—The heart becomes pure through knowledge of God.

Om—The means of attaining the Knowledge of Brahman.

The Rik etc.—That is to say, the essence of the Vedas.

Furthermore,

18

I am the Goal and the Support; the Lord and the Witness; the Abode, the Refuge, and the Friend. I am the origin and the dissolution; the ground, the storehouse, and the Imperishable Seed.

Goal—To be attained by men in the form of heavenly happiness or of supreme liberation.

Witness—Of what is done and left undone by living beings. Nothing can be hidden from the Lord, who is omniscient and omnipresent.

Abode—In Him we all live, move, and have our being.

Ground—The substratum of the universe—both in its gross and in its subtle form.

Imperishable Seed—The Lord is the seed of the universe and its living beings. As the universe is eternal, so the Lord is the imperishable seed. Or, unlike an ordinary seed, the Lord is the eternal seed; for He exists even when the universe is dissolved.

And also,

19

I give heat; I hold back and send forth rain. I am immortality, O Arjuna, and also death. I am being and I am non-being.

Heat—As the sun.

Hold back—During the dry season.

Send forth—During the rainy season.

Immortality—Enjoyed by the gods. It is relative immortality.

Death—Of mortals on earth.
Being—The manifested universe, the effect.
Non-being—The unmanifested, the cause.

The words "being" and "non-being" are used in the sense of the manifested and the unmanifested. The unmanifested, or "non-being," is the cause of the manifested, or "being." The word "non-being" is not used in the text in the sense of "non-existence."

The devotees regard the Lord in various ways and follow different methods of worship.

That those who do not worship the Lord for liberation are caught in the wheel of birth and death is stated in the following two verses:

20

Those who know the three Vedas and drink the soma-juice and are purified from sin worship Me with sacrifices and pray for passage to heaven. They reach the holy world of Indra and enjoy in heaven the celestial pleasures of the gods.

Those who know etc.—Who perform the sacrifices mentioned in the three Vedas, namely, the Rik, the Sāman, and the Yajus.

Drink the soma-juice—What is left after the oblation is made. The reference is to a Vedic injunction.

Me—Not as the Lord, but in the forms of Indra, Vasu, and other deities who fulfil the worldly ambitions of their devotees.

Passage to heaven—The highest goal of these devotees is enjoyment in heaven.

Indra—The lord of the gods. The gods of Hindu mythology denote positions in heaven that men enjoy after death as the fruits of their meritorious action performed on earth with a view to obtaining happiness. A man becomes Indra if he performs a hundred sacrifices.

21

Having enjoyed the vast heavenly world, they come back to the world of mortals when their merit is exhausted. Thus abiding by the injunctions of the three Vedas and desiring desires, they are subject to death and rebirth.

Injunctions of the three Vedas—The rituals and sacrifices enjoined in the Vedas.

Subject to death and rebirth—They do not attain liberation from the ever turning wheel of birth and death.

But people free from desires and endowed with right knowledge attain the Supreme Goal of life.

22

Those persons who worship Me, meditating on their identity with Me and ever devoted to Me—to them I carry what they lack and for them I preserve what they already have.

Meditating on their identity with Me—They totally lose their individuality in the Lord and look upon Him as their own Self. Or the word "ananyah" in the text may mean "without any other [thought]." In that case the translation should be: Those persons who worship Me, never harbouring any other thought, etc.

I carry—Because the Lord considers the jnāni to be His very Self and most dear to Him. See VII, 17-18.

The Lord promises complete protection to those who love Him with all their body, heart, and soul. A devotee, totally absorbed in the Lord, may forget his own safety and security, but the Lord never forgets him. All men, no doubt, receive from the Lord what they need; but as long as *they themselves* think of their own welfare, they must earn it by their own effort. But *the Lord Himself* carries the necessaries of life to those who, lost in the thought of Him, cannot take care of themselves.

All the deities are, no doubt, different forms of the Lord Himself. To worship them is to worship Him. Why, then, should their worshippers be deprived of liberation? Sri Krishna explains that their worship is tainted with ignorance:

23

Even those devotees who, endowed with faith, worship other gods, worship Me alone, O son of Kunti, though in a wrong way.

Other gods—Indra and others. The motive behind the worship is the attainment of power and enjoyment.

Wrong way—Because they do not seek liberation. They are steeped in ignorance. Hence they come back to the world to satisfy their unfulfilled desires.

The wrong method of worship:

24

For I alone am the Enjoyer and the Lord of all sacrifices. But these men do not know Me in reality; hence they fall.

The oblations in sacrifices may be offered to minor gods. But the Lord is the Self and the inmost Consciousness of the gods also; hence He is the real Master and Enjoyer of all sacrifices. Ignorant devotees offer their worship to the gods and attain an appropriate heaven; but after the enjoyment of the fruit of their devotion, they return to the mortal world.

Every act of worship produces its own result. No worship is futile.

25

Those who worship the gods go to the gods, those who worship the manes go to the manes, those who

worship the spirits go to the spirits, and those who worship Me come to Me.

Spirits—A class of beings lower than the gods but higher than men.

Me—The Imperishable Lord, of the nature of Supreme Bliss.

The same effort is needed for all forms of worship, but the results are quite different. People do not worship the Lord on account of their ignorance and therefore cannot enjoy imperishable happiness.

Not only does single-minded devotion to the Lord lead to an imperishable result, but it is also very simple and easy to achieve.

26

Whosoever offers Me, with devotion, a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water—that I accept, the pious offering of the pure in heart.

The minor gods demand sacrifices entailing much effort and wealth, and the reward they give is transitory. But the Lord, endowed with infinite powers and splendours, asks only love from His devotees and in return rewards them with imperishable happiness.

Because this is so, therefore,

27

Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice, whatever you give away, and whatever you practise in the form of austerities, O son of Kunti—do it as an offering to Me.

No outward worship is necessary to please the Lord. Every action of man may be transformed into worship if

the Lord is constantly kept in mind. Since the One and the manifold are two manifestations of the same Reality, one can adore God through both work and meditation. If an action is not egocentric it becomes an act of worship.

The result of such worship:

28

Thus shall you be free from the bondage of actions, which bear good or evil results. With your mind firmly set on the yoga of renunciation, you shall become free and come to Me.

Thus—By surrendering the fruits of all actions to the Lord.

Yoga of renunciation—The offering of all works to the Lord constitutes the yoga of renunciation. The followers of this yoga perform their duties but do not seek the result of their action. Therefore this method combines both yoga (karmayoga) and sannyāsa (renunciation).

You shall become free etc.—Even while living in the body you will be free from the bondage of action and after death you will attain final liberation in Me.

Is the Lord endowed with love and hatred? Does He bestow His grace on His devotees alone and not on others?

29

I am the same toward all beings; to Me there is none hateful or dear. But those who worship Me with devotion—they are in Me, and I too am in them.

The nature of the Lord may be compared to fire, which gives heat to all. Those who are near the fire feel the heat, and those who are away do not feel it. Or His nature may be compared to the wind, which blows for all boats on the water. Those sails that are in good condition can take

advantage of the wind, but the sails with holes fail to do so. The Lord is impartial to all.

Those who love the Lord and perform their duties in a selfless manner become pure in heart. The pure in heart dwell in the Lord. Thus they feel His grace. But this is not due to any particular attachment on His part. The Lord, too, dwells in them; that is to say, His presence is felt in them and not in the hearts of sinners. But it does not mean that the Lord hates sinners. As the sun's light, though falling on everything, is reflected in a clean mirror, so the glory of the Lord is visible only in those persons from whose minds all dirt has been removed bv spiritual discipline.

The glory of devotion to the Lord:

30

Even the most sinful man, if he worships Me with unswerving devotion, must be regarded as righteous; for he has formed the right resolution.

Right resolution—To give up the evil ways of life. If a man believes that devotion to the Lord is the way to liberation and acts accordingly, then he is said to have made a noble resolution.

Forgetfulness of the Lord constitutes sin, and remembrance of Him is sanctity. The darkness of accumulated sins is instantaneously removed by the Light of God.

He abandons evil ways and by dint of right resolution becomes a saint.

31

He soon becomes righteous and attains eternal peace. Proclaim it boldly, O son of Kunti, that My devotee never perishes.

My devotee—He whose inmost soul has been given to the Lord.

Ordinary spiritual disciplines, unless well practised, do not produce perfect results. But sincere love of God brings imperishable peace to the devotee.

Love of God redeems even those who are otherwise disqualified for Vedic salvation.

32

For those who take refuge in Me, O Pārtha, though they be of sinful birth—women, vaiśyas, and śudras—even they attain the Supreme Goal.

The vaiśyas are engaged in agriculture and trade; women and śudras are debarred from the study of the Vedas. Therefore all these classes of people remain outside the Vedic scheme of salvation. The statement regarding vaiśyas, śudras, and women refers to an ancient Indian religious tradition. In many places the Gitâ raises a voice of protest against certain narrow injunctions of the Vedas.

Sri Krishna spurs Arjuna to the realization of the Lord:

33

How much more, then, if they be holy brāhmins or royal seers devoted to God! Having come into this transitory, joyless world, worship Me.

Holy—Of pure birth.

Royal seers—Kings who have attained saintliness. Arjuna belongs to this class.

Human birth is conducive to the practice of spiritual discipline. But it is not easy to be born in a human body. The world is transitory and its happiness unreal. Therefore every man should direct his whole attention to the realization

of the Lord, which alone brings imperishable happiness. The aim of human life is the attainment of jivanmukti, or liberation in this very life.

How should one worship the Lord?

34

Fix your mind on Me, be devoted to Me, sacrifice to Me, bow down to Me. Having thus disciplined yourself, and regarding Me as the Supreme Goal, you will come to Me.

As the rivers, following their different courses, ultimately merge in the ocean and give up their names and forms, so the devotees, losing their names and forms, become one with the Supreme Reality.

Thus in the Bhagavad Gītā, the Essence of the Upanishads, the Science of Brahman, the Scripture of Yoga, the Dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna, ends the Ninth Chapter, entitled:

THE WAY OF THE SOVEREIGN WISDOM
AND SOVEREIGN MYSTERY

Chapter Ten

THE DIVINE MANIFESTATIONS

1

The Lord said: Once more, O mighty Arjuna, listen to My supreme word, which I, from a desire for your welfare, will impart to you, to your great delight.

Supreme word—Revealing the supreme truth.

Some of the glories of the divine manifestations have been touched on in the seventh and ninth chapters. These, as also the essential nature of the Lord, are now described in detail in the tenth chapter.

The manifestations of the Lord are a mystery. Therefore Sri Krishna, out of compassion for Arjuna, intends to describe them.

2

Neither the hosts of gods nor the great sages know My origin; for, in all respects, I am the source of the gods and the sages.

Origin—The word "prabhavam" in the text may also mean "lordly power."

In all respects—The Lord is both the efficient cause of the gods and the inspirer of their wisdom and intelligence.

The Lord is without a cause. He is changeless and immutable. Yet He manifests His glories in the universe in various ways. The mystery of these manifestations is not known even to the gods and sages, much less to ordinary mortals. Human reasoning cannot know His nature. He

reveals Himself, out of His infinite compassion, in the pure hearts of His devotees.

The result of the knowledge of the Lord:

3

He who knows that I am unborn and without a beginning, and also that I am the Supreme Lord of the worlds—he, undeluded among mortals, is freed from all sins.

Unborn—The Lord is the cause of the gods and the great sages and everything that exists. He is unborn.

Supreme Lord—He is transcendental, untouched by ignorance or its effect, the universe.

All sins—Committed consciously or unconsciously.

Ignorance of the Lord is the cause of sin. When a man does not know that he, in reality, is the pure Brahman, then he conjures up the vision of the universe with its opposites. He becomes conscious of good and evil, dharma and adharma. He participates in the activities of the world. The awareness of multiplicity impels him to hatred for disagreeable things and creates attachment to the agreeable. But the knowledge of the Lord as his inmost Self, untouched by relativity, destroys ignorance and its effect. Thus he is freed from all sins. The penances prescribed by religion do not destroy the cause of sin, which is ignorance; hence they cannot liberate the bound soul. Knowledge of the Lord, alone, gives liberation.

4-5

Intelligence, knowledge, non-delusion, forbearance, truth, self-control and calmness, pleasure and pain, birth and death, fear and fearlessness;

Non-injury, equanimity, contentment, austerity, charity, fame and obloquy—these different attributes of beings arise from Me alone.

Intelligence—A power of the mind by which a man understands subtle objects.

Knowledge—By which one knows the distinction between the Self and other objects.

Non-delusion—Discrimination in action whenever a particular situation arises.

Forbearance—Tranquillity of mind when abused or assaulted.

Truth—Giving utterance to one's own actual experience of things, as heard or seen, with a view to conveying it correctly to another person.

Self-control—The withdrawal of the external senses, such as sight, hearing, etc., from their respective objects.

Calmness—Tranquillity of the mind, or inner sense.

Non-injury—To any living being.

Contentment—Satisfaction with what one already possesses.

Charity—Sharing one's own things with others as far as one's means permit.

The Lord, alone, is the cause and basis of the universe and all its beings. Created beings are endowed with different attributes according to their karma. The law of karma functions in the relative world through the power of the Lord.

6

The seven great sages and the four Manus of ancient times, endowed with My power, were born of My mind; and from them have sprung all the creatures in the world.

Endowed with My power—Because their thoughts were directed exclusively to the Lord.

Born of My mind—They were produced from the thought of the Lord.

According to the theory of creation given in the Purānas, or Hindu mythology, Brahman associated with māyā gen-

erated the universe. The first manifestation of Brahman in time and space is known as Hiranyagarbha, Prāna, or Sutrātmā. Literally, these terms mean the "Golden Egg," "Life," and the "Cosmic Soul," or Ātman, which pervades the universe as a thread runs through a garland. Hiranyagarbha produced from its mind the first four created beings, namely Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanātana, and Sanatkumāra. It intended them to participate in the creation. However, endowed from their very birth with self-control, detachment, and the spirit of austerity, they went straightway to the forest and devoted themselves to meditation. Then Hiranyagarbha produced seven sages and four Manus, all from its mind, and ordered them to people the world with animate and inanimate beings. Having been created with a little worldly instinct, they carried out the command of their creator. The seven great rishis, or sages, were the original teachers of spiritual wisdom. The Manus were the rulers of the world and were endowed with lordly powers. Because their thoughts were directed to the Lord, the sages and the Manus were endowed with wisdom and power. The present inhabitants of the world, according to Hindu mythology, have descended from these primeval personages and inherited their wisdom.

The result of knowing these glories of the Lord:

7

He who knows in truth this glory and power of Mine acquires unshakable devotion; of this there is no doubt.

Glory—The vast extent of the Lord's being. The knowledge of the Lord is infinite.

Power—The omniscience of the Lord, as also His ability to achieve mighty things. The power and wisdom of the rishis and the Manus, referred to in the previous verse, is only a fraction of the Lord's infinite power and wisdom.

Unshakable devotion—This devotion is often compared

to the anvil in a blacksmith's shop. In spite of repeated hammer-blows the anvil remains unshaken. Likewise, the true devotee of the Lord remains unshaken in his love of God in spite of the occasional doubts inevitable in spiritual life. Such devotion leads to the Knowledge of the Absolute.

The nature of this unshakable devotion:

8

I am the origin of all; from Me all things evolve. The wise know this and worship Me with all their heart.

The Supreme Brahman, manifested in the relative world as the Lord Krishna, is the Source and the Ultimate Cause of the whole universe. The moral and physical laws controlling and sustaining the activities in the universe are manifestations of His glory and power. He is the inner Regulator of all beings; hence He alone controls the universe in all its changes, including creation and destruction, action, results, and experiences. In short, He is the power behind the evolution of the cosmos. The universe without the Lord is empty and non-existent, like a mirage without the desert, or a dream without a dreaming mind. Thus realizing the emptiness of the world by itself and knowing the Lord as the Self of all, the Cause of all, the Omniscient Master of all, the wise set themselves to the task of knowing Him alone. The more they know Him, the more they love Him with all their heart. Through love and knowledge, earnestness and reverence, they gradually attain Self-knowledge.

Worship of the Lord through love:

9

With their thought fixed on Me, with their life absorbed in Me, enlightening one another about Me,

and always conversing about Me, they derive satisfaction and delight.

Life—The word "prãna" in the text may also mean the senses.

Enlightening one another etc.—By means of reason and scriptural passages.

Satisfaction—Due to the cessation of all thirst for worldly objects. According to the *Mahābhārata*, all the happiness derived from worldly objects and all the bliss enjoyed in heaven are not worth a sixteenth part of what comes from the cessation of desires.

The Lord Himself, through His grace, gives right knowledge to those who worship Him with love.

10

On those who are ever devoted to Me and worship Me with love, I bestow the yoga of understanding, by which they come to Me.

With love—Not for any selfish purpose of their own, but out of love for the Lord.

Yoga of understanding—The word "buddhi-yoga" in the text refers to a superior and exalted condition of the mind produced by meditation on the Lord, by which the aspirant realizes the real nature of the Lord, free from all limitation.

The realization of the Lord is possible only through His grace, which He bestows on those who worship Him with whole-souled love. As a result of His grace their hearts become pure, and, being pure in heart, they see God. Men can never know the true essence of the Lord through their worldly minds or their power of reasoning. The attainment of true understanding, by which the Lord can be known and which comes through His grace alone, is the purpose of all spiritual endeavour and discipline.

Why does the Lord give right understanding to His devotees?

11

Solely out of compassion for them, I, dwelling in their hearts, dispel with the shining lamp of wisdom the darkness born of ignorance.

Solely out of compassion etc.—The Lord is ever solicitous for the liberation of created beings.

Dwelling in their hearts—The Lord manifests Himself through man's intelligence.

Dispel . . . the darkness—This darkness comprises both the beginningless nescience and the illusory perceptions resulting from that nescience. Nescience, or avidyā, cannot be destroyed by any phenomenal knowledge, since the latter itself belongs to nescience. Only the Light of the Lord can destroy it. The Divine Light shines through the buddhi, or understanding, and it is this illumined buddhi that dispels the nescience and illusory knowledge.

Lamp of wisdom—Characterized by discrimination; fed with the oil of contentment due to divine love; fanned by the wind of earnest meditation on the Lord; furnished with the wick of right intention purified by the cultivation of piety, chastity, and the other virtues; held in the chamber of the heart devoid of worldliness; placed in the sheltered recess of the mind withdrawn from sense-objects and untainted by attachment and aversion; shining with the light of right knowledge generated by incessant practice of concentration and meditation.—Śankarāchārya.

Born of ignorance—The beginningless avidyā and also the illusory knowledge caused by avidyā. Avidyā, or māyā, functions in two ways: first, it conceals the light of the Lord, and second, it manifests the illusory world.

No amount of worldly knowledge can destroy the darkness of man's heart. Worldly knowledge itself is a manifestation of nescience, as dreams are the result of unconsciousness, by which the sleeping man is overcome. It is the

Lord who, manifesting Himself through man's consciousness, removes the darkness of his mind. The intelligence, illumined by the Light of the Lord, reveals the Lord. The purpose of spiritual discipline is to purify the mind so that the Lord, the indwelling Soul, may manifest Himself through it. The pure in heart, eager for the Light, always receive the Light through the Lord's grace.

Arjuna desires to know in detail the Lord's glories, which have been briefly described by Krishna.

12-13

Arjuna said: You are the Supreme Brahman, the Supreme Abode, the Supreme Holiness. All the sages have declared You to be the eternal, self-luminous Person, the first of the gods, unborn and all-pervading; likewise have the divine sages Nārada, Asita, Devala, and Vyāsa proclaimed. So, too, have You said unto me.

14

I hold as true all that You have said to me, O Keśava. Verily, neither the gods nor the demons, O Lord, know Your manifestations.

Neither the gods nor the demons etc.—Arjuna refers to the various Incarnations of the Lord, in the past, for the protection of the gods and the destruction of the demons. Neither the gods nor the demons, at that time, were aware of the Lord's glories, though they witnessed them with their own eyes. The Lord remains for ever inscrutable to the worldly-minded.

Lord—The word "Bhagavān" in the text signifies One in whom ever exist in their fullness all powers, all dharma, all glory, all success, all renunciation, and all freedom. The word also refers to Him who knows the origin, the dissolution, and the future of all beings, and the nature of knowledge and ignorance.

15

You alone know Yourself through Yourself, O Supreme Person, O Creator of all beings, O Lord of all beings, O God of gods, O Ruler of the world.

Know Yourself—Since the Lord is endowed with unsurpassed wisdom, sovereignty, and other divine attributes, none else knows all the manifestations of the Lord, much less His unconditioned and transcendent nature.

Through Yourself—Without any outside help.

Supreme Person—Beyond māyā and the three gunas.

You alone know Your own manifestations; not even the gods understand them.

16

You should indeed tell me, in full, of Your divine powers, whereby You pervade all the worlds and abide in them.

You should indeed tell me—Since the Lord's nature is unknown and unknowable to others.

Arjuna has come to realize that the whole creation is nothing but the manifestation of the Lord's powers, and no one but the Lord Himself knows their mystery. So he desires to learn about those powers from the Lord Himself.

17

How may I know You, O Yogi, by constant meditation? In what various things, O Lord, are You to be contemplated by me?

How may I know You etc.—Arjuna realizes his own dull understanding. He asks Sri Krishna in what manner he should meditate constantly on the Lord so that his intelligence may be purified and he may know the Lord's unconditioned being.

Yogi—The Lord is addressed as a yogi because He is endowed with infinite powers and glories.

The whole universe is the manifestation of the Lord's glory. All objects reflect His glory. He is the reality immanent in all things. But some objects, high in evolution and endowed with more power and wisdom, reflect the Lord's glory more than others. Though all objects reflect light, yet it is seen more in a mirror than in a piece of wood. It is easy for devotees to meditate on God through those objects in which His glory is most manifest. Hence Kṛishna will presently describe some of the prominent manifestations of the Lord in the universe.

18

Tell me once more, in detail, O Janārdana, of Your yoga-powers and glories; for I am never filled with hearing Your ambrosial words.

Janārdana—An epithet by which Krishna is called when He is thought of as fulfilling man's prayers for prosperity and liberation.

19

The Lord said: I will tell you now of My divine attributes, O best of the Kurus—only of those that are pre-eminent; for there is no limit to My extent.

Those that are pre-eminent—So that Arjuna may most readily see the power of the Lord.

God is infinite and His manifestation is infinite. He manifests Himself in the universe through innumerable forms. Each form is a symbol of an attribute of the Lord. The true seer finds each finite form carrying in it its own revelation of the infinite.

The foremost manifestation of the Lord:

20

I am the Self, O Gudākeśa, seated in the hearts of

all creatures. I am the beginning, the middle, and the end of all beings.

Self—The Lord should be thought of as the inmost Self of all creatures.

Guḍākeśa—*Lit.,* conqueror of sleep; an epithet of Arjuna.

Beginning etc.—All beings have come from the Lord, they are sustained by Him, and in the end they all merge in Him.

If one is unable to meditate on the Lord as the Self, then one should think of Him in the things mentioned below; for He is the essence of all things.

21

Of the Ādityas I am Vishnu; of lights I am the radiant sun. I am Marichi of the Maruts, and among the orbs of night I am the moon.

Ādityas—A group of twelve deities.

Maruts—The winds.

Sri Krishna enumerates, in this and the following verses, the various beings—gods, superhuman and human and subhuman creatures, angels, etc.—and points out that the chief and the head of each class is a special manifestation of the Godhead.

22

Of the Vedas I am the Sāman; of the gods I am Indra. Of the senses I am the mind, and in living beings I am intelligence.

Vedas—The sacred scriptures of the Hindus.

Sāman—The Sāma-Veda is noted for its rhythm and melody.

Mind—Through the mind the sense-organs receive the impressions of objects and react upon them. According to

Hindu psychology there are eleven senses: five senses of perception, five organs of action, and the mind.

Intelligence—Through intelligence, or discriminative consciousness, manifesting itself in the aggregate of the body and senses, a man becomes conscious of himself and the outside world.

23

Of the Rudras I am Śiva; of the Yakshas and Rākshasas I am Kuvera. Of the Vasus I am fire, and of mountains I am Meru.

Rudras—A group of gods, eleven in number, supposed to be collateral manifestations of Śiva, who is their leader.

Yakshas and Rākshasas—A class of demigods.

Kuvera—The lord of wealth.

Vasus—A class of deities, usually eight in number.

Meru—Abounding in gold and other treasures.

24

Of priests, O Pārtha, know Me to be the chief, Brihaspati. Of generals I am Skanda; of reservoirs of water I am the ocean.

Brihaspati—The high priest of Indra, king of heaven.

Skanda—The commander-in-chief of the armies in heaven.

25

Of the great rishis I am Bhrigu, and of words I am the monosyllable "Om." Of sacrifices I am the sacrifice of japa; of immovable things I am the Himālaya.

Bhrigu—Noted for his power and realization. According to Hindu mythology the Lord Himself bears on His chest Bhrigu's foot-print.

Om—The most effective symbol of the Lord in both His personal and His impersonal aspect.

Japa—Repetition of the Lord's name. Various sacrifices have been prescribed for the spiritual progress of the

aspirant. Most of them require the slaughter of animals or costly ingredients. But repetition of the Lord's name is the simplest and most effective way to attain Him.

26

Of all trees I am the aśvattha, and of the devarshis I am Nārada. Of the Gandharvas I am Chitraratha, and of the perfected ones I am the sage Kapila.

Aśvattha—The holy fig tree.

Devarshis—Who are, at the same time, gods and rishis, or seers of mantras.

Gandharvas—A class of demigods regarded as the singers or musicians of the gods.

Perfected ones—Those who from their very birth are endowed with a high degree of righteousness, knowledge, detachment, and lordship.

27

Of horses know Me to be Uchchais-sravas, born of the amrita; of lordly elephants I am Airāvata, and of men I am the monarch.

Uchchais-sravas—The name of the kingly horse that came out of the ocean when, according to Hindu mythology, it was churned for the amrita, or elixir of immortality.

Airāvata—This royal elephant had the same origin as Uchchais-sravas. Both horse and elephant were given to Indra, the king of the gods.

28

Of weapons I am the thunderbolt; of cows I am Kāmadhuk. I am Kandarpa, the cause of offspring, and of serpents I am Vāsuki.

Thunderbolt—The weapon belonging to Indra. The sage Dadhichi gave his own bones to make this powerful missile.

Kāmadhuk—The famous cow of the sage Vaśishtha, which fulfilled all desires. Or it may mean any cow that yields abundant milk.

Kandarpa—The name of the Hindu god of love. Through his influence man and woman seek each other's company.

Cause of offspring—The implication is that the sexual relation is justified only for begetting children and not simply for physical enjoyment.

Vāsuki—The mythical king of the serpents.

29

Of the Nāgas I am Ananta; of the dwellers in water I am Varuna. Of the Pitris I am Aryamā, and of those that practise self-control I am Yama.

Nāgas—A class of snakes.

Dwellers in water—The deities that control lakes, seas, oceans, etc.

Pitris—Departed ancestors.

Yama—The king of death, who decides the fate of the departed souls and rewards or punishes them. He is endowed with great self-control so that he may not be swayed by personal preferences.

30

Of the Daityas I am Prahlāda, and of measurers I am Time. Of beasts I am the lion, and of birds I am Garuḍa.

Daityas—*Lit.*, the offspring of Diti. The word generally signifies the demons, who challenge the power of good.

Prahlāda—Who was endowed with great love of God and other spiritual attributes.

Time—Which is without beginning and end in the relative world and is the ultimate measurer of all things.

Garuḍa—The carrier of the Lord Vishnu.

31

Of purifiers I am the wind; of warriors I am Rāma. Of fishes I am the shark, and of rivers I am the Ganges.

Rāma—The great hero of the *Rāmāyana*.

32

Of created things I am the beginning and the end and also the middle, O Arjuna. Of all sciences I am the Science of the Self, and in disputation I am reason.

The Science of the Self—Because it is the basis of all other sciences, and also because it leads men to liberation.

33

Of letters I am the letter A, and of compound words I am the Dvanda. I Myself am inexhaustible Time, and I am the Dispenser facing everywhere.

The letter A—It is the first of letters, and all sounds are based on the A sound. In Sanskrit it is pronounced as *o* in rod.

Compound words—Sanskrit grammar lays down rules for joining two or more words into a compound word, in which the meaning of the component parts may be fully or partly retained. The peculiarity of the Dvanda compound is that it keeps intact the meanings of its component parts.

Time—The word here signifies the moment. As a unit of time, one moment follows another in never ending succession.

Dispenser—The gods also give the fruits of action to their devotees; but these fruits belong to the realm of the finite. The Lord, however, bestows on His devotee the supreme fruit of liberation.

Facing everywhere—It is the Lord alone whom we see on all sides. Through all mouths He eats, through all eyes He sees, through all ears He hears, and through all minds He thinks.

34

I am all-seizing Death. I am the prosperity of those who are to be prosperous, and of female powers I am Glory, Fortune, Speech, Memory, Intelligence, Constancy, and Forbearance.

All-seizing Death—As the loss of life is death, so also is the loss of fortune. The Lord's power is more manifest in the former, since that form of death is the stronger of the two. Or the Lord is called all-seizing Death because at the time of the cosmic dissolution everything merges in Him.

Female powers—Glory, Fortune, etc. are the seven most exalted female deities.

35

Of the Sāman hymns I am the Brihat-Sāman, and of metres I am the Gāyatri. Of months I am Mārgaśirsha, and of seasons I am the flowery spring.

Brihat-Sāman—Which contains the hymns to Indra and formulates the science of liberation.

Gāyatri—A Vedic metre of twenty-four syllables; also the name of a sacred Vedic verse repeated daily by every brāhmin at the time of his regular devotions.

Mārgaśirsha—In ancient times the Hindu calendar began with this month, which includes part of November and of December.

36

I am the gambling of cheats; I am the vigour of the strong. I am victory; I am effort; I am the quality of sattva in the good.

Gambling of cheats—Such as dice-play, card-play, etc. Through these means cunning people cheat others. Every manifestation of power, glory, success, or intelligence comes from the Lord Himself. It may be distorted if the medium of manifestation is wicked or unrighteous.

Quality of sattva—Of the three gunas, sattva denotes goodness, serenity, harmony, and so on.

37

Of the Yādavas I am Vāsudeva, and of the Pāndavas I am Arjuna. Of the sages I am Vyāsa, and of seers I am Uśanas the seer.

Yādavas—The race of Krishna.

Vāsudeva—Krishna, whose father's name was Vasudeva.

Pāndavas—The five sons of Pāndu: Yudhishthira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva.

Sages—Philosophers and thinkers.

Vyāsa—The compiler of the Vedas.

Seers—Inspired poets, who see Truth through their power of intuition.

38

I am the rod of those that chastise and the statesmanship of those that conquer. Of secret things I am silence, and of the wise I am the wisdom.

Chastise—That is to say, the wicked.

Statesmanship—Which is the most effective way of conquering an enemy. The Hindu law-givers recommend four methods of dealing with an enemy, namely, appeasement, coercion, internal division, and statesmanship, according to the situation.

The Lord summarizes His glories:

39

And that which is the seed of all beings—that am I, O Arjuna. There is no being, whether moving or unmoving, that can exist without Me.

Can exist without Me—The Lord is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. Anything that is without the Lord is void. He alone pervades all.

40

There is no end of My divine manifestations, O dreaded Arjuna. This is but a partial statement by Me of the multiplicity of My attributes.

There is no end etc.—As the Lord is infinite, His manifestations are infinite in number.

41

Whatever glorious or beautiful or mighty being exists anywhere, know that it has sprung from but a spark of My splendour.

42

But what need is there of your acquiring this detailed knowledge, O Arjuna? With a single fragment of Myself I stand supporting the whole universe.

One can never fully know the Lord through His manifestations in time and space. It is enough to know that the whole universe represents only a particle of the Lord's glory. He transcends the universe. "All beings form His foot." (*Taittiriya Āranyaka.*)

Thus in the Bhagavad Gītā, the Essence of the Upanishads, the Science of Brahman, the Scripture of Yoga, the Dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna, ends the Tenth Chapter, entitled:

THE DIVINE MANIFESTATIONS

Chapter Eleven

THE VISION OF THE UNIVERSAL FORM

1

Arjuna said: Out of compassion for me You have spoken words of ultimate profundity concerning the Self, and they have dispelled my delusion.

My delusion—Arjuna is deluded to think he will be responsible for the slaying of his relatives on the battlefield, forgetting that the Lord alone is the doer, and man only His instrument.

The tenth chapter ended with a declaration of the Lord that He supports the whole universe by a single fragment of His being. Arjuna is now desirous of seeing with his own eyes the form of the Lord that sustains the world system.

2

I have learnt from You at length, O lotus-eyed Krishna, of the origin and dissolution of beings, and also of Your inexhaustible greatness.

Origin and dissolution etc.—The Lord Himself is the origin and dissolution of beings.

Inexhaustible greatness—The infinite and ineffable greatness of the Lord consists in the fact that He remains unchanging, impartial, unagitated, detached, and indifferent although He is the Creator of the universe, the guide and controller of all beings, the cause of their participating in good and evil actions, and the giver of their rewards and punishments.

3

As You have declared Yourself to be, O Supreme Lord—even so it is. Yet do I desire to see Your Iśvara-form, O Supreme Purusha.

Iśvara-form—The divine form as possessed of omnipotence, omnipresence, infinite wisdom, infinite strength, infinite virtue, and infinite splendour.

Arjuna evinces humility:

4

If, O Lord, You think me able to behold it, then, O Master of yogis, reveal to me Your immutable Self.

5

The Lord said: Behold My forms, O Pārtha, by the hundreds and the thousands—manifold and divine, various in shape and hue.

6

Behold the Ādityas and the Vasus and the Rudras and the twin Aświns and the Maruts; behold, O Bhārata, many wonders that no one has ever seen before.

7

Behold here today, O Guḍākeśa, the whole universe, of the moving and the unmoving, and whatever else you desire to see, all concentrated in My body.

Today—It takes an ordinary mortal millions of births to grasp the universe in its entirety. And the Lord reveals to Arjuna's eyes the entire panorama.

Whatever else you desire to see—Future events such as the ultimate outcome of the battle, about which Arjuna

has been in doubt. The past, present, and future—nay, time itself—exist only in a fragment of the Lord.

All concentrated in My body—Related and unified in the Lord.

Sri Krishna is about to reveal to Arjuna the most staggering vision: the vision of the One in the many, the many in the One, the vision that shows that all are the One. This vision alone explains and justifies the apparent contradictions of the relative world and reconciles the antinomies of justice and mercy, fate and free will, suffering and divine love. It reveals all that was, is, and shall be. It relates and unifies the diversity of the world. Seeing God in all and all in God, man overcomes all doubt and perplexity and submits to the divine will. Thus even the most terrible thing in the world loses its terror and even the most hateful thing becomes a mode of the Lord's manifestation. The man blessed with this vision accepts the world with an all-embracing joy and great courage and goes forward with sure steps to discharge his appointed task. He sees all things *in one view*, and not in a divided, partial, and bewildered fashion.

8

But with these eyes of yours you cannot see Me. I give you a divine eye; behold, now, My sovereign yoga-power.

Eyes of yours—The human eye can see only outward appearances of things and their manifold forms.

Divine eye—Which alone can see the Godhead, the unity that underlies all appearances.

9

Sanjaya said: Having spoken thus, O King, Hari, the great Lord of Yoga, revealed to Arjuna His supreme form as Iśvara:

King—Refers to Dhritarāshtra. Sanjaya is his reporter of the events on the battle-field.

10-11

With many faces and eyes, presenting many wondrous sights, bedecked with many celestial ornaments, armed with many divine uplifted weapons; wearing celestial garlands and vestments, anointed with divine perfumes, all-wonderful, resplendent, boundless, and with faces on all sides.

12

If the radiance of a thousand suns were to burst forth at once in the sky, that would be like the splendour of the Mighty One.

13

There, in the person of the God of gods, Arjuna beheld the whole universe, with its manifold divisions, all gathered together in one.

With its manifold divisions—Gods, demigods, manes, men, and so on.

The multitudinously divided universe is unified in the person of the Lord.

14

Then, overcome with wonder, his hair standing on end, Arjuna bowed his head to the Lord, joined his palms in salutation, and thus addressed Him:

15

Arjuna said: In Thy body, O Lord, I behold all the gods and all the diverse hosts of beings—the Lord Brahmā, seated on the lotus, and all the rishis and the celestial serpents.

16

I behold Thee with myriads of arms and bellies, with myriads of faces and eyes; I behold Thee, infinite

in form, on every side, but I see not Thy end nor Thy middle nor Thy beginning, O Lord of the universe, O Universal Form!

17

I behold Thee on all sides glowing like a mass of radiance, with Thy diadem and mace and discus, blazing everywhere like burning fire and the burning sun, hard to look at, and passing all measure.

Arjuna can endure this dazzling vision because he is endowed with the divine eye. Ordinary consciousness is blasted by such radiance.

18

Thou art the Imperishable, the Supreme Being to be realized; Thou art the Supreme Support of the universe; Thou art the undying Guardian of the Eternal Dharma; Thou art, in my belief, the Primal Being.

This great vision reveals also the terrific image of the Destroyer:

19

I behold Thee as one without beginning, middle, or end; with infinite arms and immeasurable strength; with the sun and moon as Thine eyes; with Thy face shining like a blazing fire; and burning with Thy radiance the whole universe.

20

By Thee alone are filled all the space between heaven and earth, and all the quarters of the sky. O Mighty One, the three worlds behold Thy marvellous and appalling form and tremble with fear.

21

Into Thee enter these hosts of gods, and some in fear extol Thee with folded hands. And bands of Rishis and Siddhas exclaim, "May there be peace!" and praise Thee with splendid hymns.

Siddhas—Semi-divine beings of great purity and holiness, endowed with supernatural powers.

Exclaim etc.—In order to ward off the imminent destruction of the world.

22

The Rudras, Ādityas, Vasus, and Sādhyas; the Viśwas, Aświns, Maruts, and Ushmapās; and the hosts of Gandharvas, Yakshas, Asuras, and Siddhas—all behold Thee and are amazed.

Ushmapās—The manes.

23

Beholding Thy great form, O Mighty Lord, with myriads of mouths and eyes, with myriads of arms and thighs and feet, with myriads of bellies, and with myriads of terrible tusks—the worlds are affrighted, and so am I.

The Universal Form of the Lord reveals to Arjuna the terrible, as well as the beautiful, aspect of the creation; both are necessary to complete the picture. The Lord manifests Himself in the relative world through both good and evil, pain and pleasure, life and death, and the other pairs of opposites; whereas, in His inmost essence, He can be described only as Peace and Blessedness.

The cause of Arjuna's terror:

24

When I look upon Thy blazing form reaching to the skies and shining in many colours, when I see

Thee with Thy mouths opened wide and Thy great eyes glowing bright, my inmost soul trembles in fear, and I find neither courage nor peace, O Vishnu!

Vishnu—An epithet of the Godhead, because of Its all-pervasive nature.

25

When I behold Thy mouths, striking terror with their tusks, like Time's all-consuming fire, I am disoriented and find no peace. Be gracious, O Lord of the gods, O Abode of the universe!

Time's all-consuming fire—The fire that consumes the world at the time of cosmic dissolution.

26-27

All these sons of Dhritarāshtra, together with the hosts of monarchs, and Bhishma, Drona, and Karna, and the warrior chiefs of our side as well, enter precipitately Thy tusked and terrible mouths, frightful to behold. Some are seen caught between Thy teeth, their heads crushed to powder.

Arjuna has had doubts concerning the ultimate outcome of the war. Now he has a prevision of the holocaust that will take place on the battle-field, in which the leaders of both sides will be destroyed; he further realizes that his party will be victorious. The inexorable law of the cosmos, emanating from the Godhead, will accomplish all this, using Arjuna merely as an instrument.

28

As the many torrents of the rivers rush toward the ocean, so do the heroes of the mortal world rush into Thy fiercely flaming mouths.

29

As moths rush swiftly into a blazing fire to perish there, even so do these creatures swiftly rush into Thy mouths to their own destruction.

Neither Arjuna nor anyone else can stop the Lord's will. Men's efforts and reasons are helpless before the march of events already accomplished by the Godhead.

30

Thou lickest Thy lips, devouring all the worlds on every side with Thy flaming mouths. Thy fiery rays fill the whole universe with their radiance and scorch it, O Vishnu!

Thou lickest Thy lips—The Lord is enjoying this destruction with evident delight.

If men's destiny and the divine will conspire together to scorch the earth with the fire of destruction, the effort of the individual to stop it cannot be anything but useless.

Arjuna's soul is troubled; he finds no peace. In pain he cries out:

31

Tell me who Thou art that wearest this frightful form. Salutations to Thee, O God Supreme! Have mercy. I desire to know Thee, who art the Primal One; for I do not understand Thy purpose.

Thy purpose—In willing this holocaust.

Krishna has been Arjuna's life-long friend and companion. In the twinkling of an eye He has transformed Himself into the Supreme Godhead, a part of whose Universal Form manifests the horror of destruction. Arjuna,

frightened and bewildered, begs to be enlightened as to the real nature of the Lord.

32

The Lord said: I am mighty, world-destroying Time, now engaged here in slaying these men. Even without you, all these warriors standing arrayed in the opposing armies shall not live.

Time—A manifestation of the Godhead. Time absorbs into the womb of oblivion all names and forms.

In slaying these men—The Lord in the fullness of time destroys the old structures in order to build up a new, mighty, and splendid kingdom. Destruction is always a simultaneous or alternate element that keeps pace with creation, and it is by destroying and renewing that the Lord carries on His long work of preservation. In the relative world destruction is the first condition of progress. Individually, the man who does not destroy his lower self cannot rise to a greater existence. On a larger scale, the nation or community or race that shrinks too long from destroying and replacing its outworn forms of life is itself destroyed, and out of its debris other nations, communities, and races are formed.

Even without you—The abstention or non-intervention or protest of the individual cannot prevent the fulfilment of the divine will; rather, by the lacuna, it increases confusion.

Kâli or Rudra, the Destroyer God, as well as Brahmā, the Creator God, are both manifestations of the Godhead in the relative world. The one is incomplete, helpless, nay, illusory, without the other. The weak mind of man, desiring fair and comforting truths or pleasant fables, robs Reality of one of Its aspects and thus deludes itself with a half truth. To ignore the stern and destructive aspect of Reality is to miss the full significance of divine love and peace and calmness and eternity. To put the responsibility for all that seems to be terrible or destructive on the shoulders of a

semi-omnipotent Devil, or to explain the apparent evil as part of Nature, or to throw the burden of it all on man and his sins, are clumsy, if convenient, devices. The Gītā teaches us to see Reality as a whole. God the bountiful and prodigal Creator and Preserver is also God the Destroyer and Devourer.

33

Therefore stand up and win glory; conquer your enemies and enjoy an opulent kingdom. By Me and none other have they already been slain; be an instrument only, O Arjuna.

Arjuna—The word used in the text is "Savyasāchin," an epithet given to Arjuna on account of his dexterity in shooting arrows with his left hand as well as his right.

The Lord, as all-devouring Time, has already killed the warriors. None can stay the hand of the divine will. Sri Krishna reminds Arjuna that the latter has been appointed by the Lord as His human instrument in this struggle, which none can prevent and which will vindicate the power of righteousness by destroying the force of evil. Let Arjuna's will be one with the will of God. Let him cooperate with God in fulfilling a supreme purpose. The reward that is promised is also determined by the divine will. Arjuna has been chosen for the grand prize on account of his good karma in the past.

34

Kill Drona and Bhishma and Jayadratha and Karna, and the other great warriors as well, who have already been killed by Me. Be not distressed by fear. Fight, and you shall conquer your foes in the battle.

Who have already been killed by Me—That is to say, in the foreordaining mind of the Lord. Arjuna was afraid of incurring sin by killing his elders, teachers, or relatives. Now he is made to realize that he is only an instrument in

the hands of God, who alone is responsible for all actions. The consciousness of the divine agency and its consistent application in all works release man from responsibility.

Be not distressed by fear—Drona, Bhishma, and the others mentioned in the text are great warriors. Drona has in his possession many celestial weapons. Bhishma, by a divine boon, does not have to die until he likes. As to Jayadratha, his father had received a boon that whoever would cause his son's head to drop on the earth would lose his own head too. Karna is armed with a divine weapon that makes him invincible. There is a lurking fear, in Arjuna's mind, of their invincibility. The Lord, with His words of reassurance, encourages Arjuna to do his duty with a fearless heart.

You shall conquer etc.—Because such is the divine will. Arjuna is not permitted to take credit for his victory.

35

Sanjaya said: Having heard these words of Krishna, Arjuna trembled, folded his hands in adoration, and bowed down. Overwhelmed with fear, he saluted Krishna and then addressed Him again, with faltering voice.

Trembled—His trembling, fear, faltering voice, and so on, show that Arjuna is shaken with emotion. The Universal Form of the Lord, emphasizing destruction, strikes terror into his heart, and the encouragement of the Lord fills him with gratitude.

As the reader may remember, the two sides on the battlefield are represented by the hundred sons of Dhritarāshtra and the five sons of Pāndu. Since Dhritarāshtra is blind, Sanjaya acts as his reporter.

Sanjaya's words are very significant. He hopes that King Dhritarāshtra will clearly foresee the inevitable destruction of his sons and thus, in despair, bring about peace by fulfilling the just demands of Yudhishthira and his brothers. But Dhritarāshtra is blind both physically and spiritually. Destiny must be fulfilled.

36

Arjuna said: It is right, O Hrishikeśa, that the world rejoices and delights in glorifying Thee; the Rākshasas flee on all sides in terror, and the hosts of Siddhas all bow to Thee in adoration.

The world rejoices—Because there lies behind the terrifying form the reassuring, fearless, and delightful Being of the Lord. He always protects the righteous.

Flee on all sides etc.—Because the power of evil and darkness cannot stand the force of good and light, which is the nature of the Lord.

Siddhas—Perfected souls.

For the following reason, also, the Lord is the object of delight:

37

And why should they not bow down to Thee, O Mighty Being, greater than all, since Thou art the Primal Cause even of Brahmā? O Infinite One, Lord of gods, Abode of the universe, Thou art the Imperishable, Being and non-being, and that which is the Supreme.

Brahmā—The Creator God, who is only one aspect of His Trinity, the other two aspects being Vishnu (the Preserver God) and Śiva (the Destroyer God).

Primal Cause etc.—There are evolution and involution of the Trinity, but the Godhead is eternal and immutable.

Being and non-being—Existence and non-existence, relatively speaking, are the two conditions of the Spirit's manifestation.

The Supreme—That which lies beyond Being and non-being and is their basis. A timeless eternity is the characteristic of the Absolute, of which time is only a manifestation in māyā.

38

Thou art the first of gods, the ancient Soul; Thou art the supreme Resting-place of the universe; Thou art the Knower and That which is to be known and the Ultimate Goal. And by Thee is the world pervaded, O Thou of infinite form.

First of gods—Because of His being the Creator of the universe.

Ancient Soul—He is called Purusha, or Soul, because He lies in each body. He is ancient because He is the manifester of time.

Supreme Resting-place etc.—At the time of the great dissolution the universe rests in Him.

Knower—Of everything great and small.

By Thee is the world pervaded—The illusory world is seen because the Lord forms its unchanging substratum. As, in the illusion of a rope appearing as a snake, the rope pervades the snake, so also, in the illusion of the Lord appearing as the universe, the Lord pervades the universe.

The Lord is the inmost essence of all the gods.

39

Thou art Wind and Death and Fire and Moon and the Lord of Water. Thou art Prajāpati and the Great-grandsire. Salutations, salutations to Thee a thousand times, and again and yet again salutations, salutations to Thee!

Prajāpati—One of the first created beings, whose offspring are the men and women of the world.

Great-grandsire—The father of Brahmā, who is the grandfather of men.

Arjuna's emotions are greatly aroused. He repeats his salutations:

40

Salutations to Thee before, salutations to Thee behind, salutations to Thee on every side, O All! Infinite in might and immeasurable in strength, Thou pervadest all and therefore Thou art all.

On every side—Since the Lord is present everywhere.

But the Supreme Being has been living with Arjuna as his friend and companion without being recognized as the Godhead. Arjuna has treated Him as a man and overlooked His divinity; so he now asks His forgiveness:

41-42

Whatever I have rashly said from inadvertence or love, addressing Thee as "O Krishna," "O Yādava," or "O Friend," regarding Thee merely as a friend, unaware of Thy greatness; and in whatever other ways I may have shown disrespect to Thee while playing or resting, while sitting or eating, while alone, O Eternal Lord, or in the presence of others—all that I implore Thee, O Immeasurable, to forgive.

Thy greatness—The Universal Form.

43

Thou art the Father of the world—of all that move and all that do not move. Thou art the object of its worship, its most venerable Teacher. There is no one equal to Thee; how then, in the three worlds, could there be another superior to Thee, O Thou of incomparable might?

44

Therefore I bow down and prostrate my body before Thee, the adorable Lord, and seek Thy grace.

Bear with me, O Lord, as a father with a son, as a friend with a friend, as a lover with his beloved.

45-46

I rejoice that I have seen what was never seen before; but my mind is also troubled with fear. Show me that other form of Thine. Be gracious, O Lord of gods, O Abode of the universe. I would see Thee as before, with Thy crown and Thy mace and the discus in Thy hand. Assume again Thy four-armed shape, O Thou of a thousand arms and of endless shapes.

Thy four-armed shape—Sri Krishna is none other than the Lord Vishnu. His divine form has four arms, holding a conch, a discus, a mace, and a lotus. That form He now and then reveals to His devotees. Arjuna always cherishes it in his heart, though Krishna moves in the world as an ordinary mortal with two arms.

The Universal Form of the Lord, embodying the gods, the demons, and the different forces of Nature, and also revealing the terror of destruction, is, for the ordinary mind, overwhelming, appalling, incommunicable. The reason may seek the vastness, omnipresence, omnipotence, and completeness of the Godhead, but the heart wants a tender manifestation that is capable of loving and being loved in return. Therefore the Lord assumes, for the sake of His devotees, a humanized form. It is this mediating aspect—Nārāyana, the God-man—that reassures and soothes the hungry soul of the devotee. It makes the Lord close, intimate, visible, and living. The devotee establishes with this humanized symbol a tender, human relationship and regards it as Father, Mother, Friend, Companion, or Beloved. At the wish of the devotee the Lord withdraws the human form and reveals to him His impersonal and universal aspect.

To allay Arjuna's fear Sri Krishna assumes His usual form and consoles him:

47

The Lord said: By My grace, through My own yoga-power, O Arjuna, I have shown you this supreme form, resplendent, universal, infinite, and primeval, which none but you has ever seen.

My grace—Because Arjuna is the beloved devotee of Krishna. The revelation of the Lord depends on His grace alone; man cannot force it by his own efforts.

Yoga-power—The lordly power inherent in the Godhead.

Arjuna must consider himself highly blessed for having seen the Universal Form.

48

Neither by the study of the Vedas and sacrifices, nor by gifts, nor by rituals, nor by severe penances, is this form of Mine to be seen in the world of men by anyone but you, O chief of the Kurus.

By human endeavour through knowledge, austerities, sacrifice, and self-denial one can see a particular aspect of the Godhead. But Arjuna has seen the Lord in His Universal Form, reconciling all the aspects of divinity at one and the same time and in one and the same vision. In an ineffable oneness are revealed all the facets of the Godhead—spirit and matter, being and becoming, creation and destruction, infinite and finite, space and time, past and future. This vision is vouchsafed only to the devotee who adores the Lord with single-minded, all-consuming, and unswerving love.

49

Be not afraid, be not bewildered, on seeing this terrific form of Mine. Free from fear and glad at heart, behold again My other form.

My other form—Which is so dear to Arjuna. This form of the Lord has four arms.

50

Sanjaya said: Having thus addressed Arjuna, Vāsudeva revealed to him His own form. The Great One assumed a graceful shape again and comforted the terrified Pāndava.

Graceful shape—The human shape that Arjuna cherishes in his heart.

51

Arjuna said: Looking at this gentle form of Yours, O Janārdana, I now feel composed in mind; I am myself again.

The bhaktas, or lovers of God, do not like to dwell on His impersonal and transcendental form. As long as they live in a human body, they desire to worship a Personal God through love.

52

The Lord said: It is very hard to see this form of Mine, which you have seen. Even the gods are ever eager to see this form.

The gods may desire to see the Universal Form of the Lord, but they cannot see it. According to the Hindu religion, the gods pass their time in the heavenly realm enjoying intense and refined material pleasures. In order to experience the boon of liberation they have to be born again on earth as men.

53

Neither by the Vedas, nor by penances, nor by alms-giving, nor yet by sacrifice, am I to be seen in the form in which you have now beheld Me.

How can one see the Lord's Universal Form?

54

But by devotion to Me alone may I be known in this form, O Arjuna, realized truly, and entered into, O dreaded prince.

Devotion to Me alone—Love that seeks nothing but the Lord and that makes the devotee see the Lord alone through all the senses. Such unswerving love removes all distinctions between the devotee and the Lord and enables the former, if he desires, to enjoy the Knowledge of Brahman.

May I be known etc.—As declared in the scriptures.

Realized truly—By means of direct and immediate perception.

Entered into—The devotee attains final liberation in the Lord after giving up the body.

The essential teaching of the Gītā, which leads to the highest bliss, is now summed up:

55

He who does My work and looks on Me as the Supreme Goal, who is devoted to Me, who is without attachment and without hatred for any creature—he comes to Me, O Pāndava.

Does My work—That is to say, dedicates all works to the Lord and seeks no reward for himself.

Without attachment—To relatives, wealth, and so on, though he may have to live in their midst.

Without hatred—Even for those who may do him harm.

Comes to Me—Uninterruptedly enjoys the Lord as long as he lives and afterwards becomes one with Him.

Thus in the Bhagavad Gītā, the Essence of the Upanishads, the Science of Brahman, the Scripture of Yoga, the Dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna, ends the Eleventh Chapter, entitled:

THE VISION OF THE UNIVERSAL FORM

Chapter Twelve

THE WAY OF DIVINE LOVE

1

Arjuna said: Those devotees who, ever steadfast, worship You after this fashion, and those others who worship the Imperishable and Unmanifest—which of these have greater knowledge of yoga?

Ever steadfast—Always united with the Lord through actions performed for the Lord's sake. These devotees have the Lord alone for their support. They constantly meditate on His manifested Universal Form and work as His instruments, surrendering the results to Him.

After this fashion—Referring to the last verse of the preceding chapter (XI, 55).

Those others etc.—Referring to the sannyāsis, who renounce all desires and actions in order to realize their oneness with Brahman.

Worship—The word is used here in the sense of meditation or contemplation. It is obvious that worship implying a subject and object cannot be applied to the aspirant seeking the Knowledge of Brahman.

Unmanifest—Inapprehensible by the senses, since Brahman is devoid of all upādhis, or limiting adjuncts.

Aspirants can meditate on the Godhead in two ways. The devotees of the Impersonal Brahman regard It as the incomprehensible, indefinable, formless, relationless, actionless, featureless, attributeless, and transcendental Absolute. The devotees of the Personal God regard the Godhead as the Lord of the universe, the Supreme Person, the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer, the omniscient and omnipresent Lord, endowed with the Universal Form and possessed of the great powers of yoga. The Absolute never puts on any form,

abstains from all action, enters into no relation with the universe, and is eternally silent and immutable; but the Personal God is our Lord and Master, the Source and Origin of all beings, immanent in all things, manifest in both nature and living beings as their inmost Self. Both these aspects of the Godhead have been described by Krishna in the Gītā, though with an emphasis on the Impersonal aspect in Chapters Two through Ten. The eleventh chapter deals with the Universal Form of the Godhead and ends with an exhortation to Arjuna to worship It as the Lord of the universe. Now Arjuna asks which of the two methods of worship is better: meditation on the Impersonal or worship of the Lord through work and love.

2

The Lord said: Those who have fixed their minds on Me, and who, ever steadfast and endowed with supreme faith, worship Me—them do I hold to be perfect in yoga.

Me—The Universal Form, which reveals the Godhead as the Supreme Lord of the universe.

Ever steadfast—As described in the last verse of the eleventh chapter.

Supreme faith—By which one sees God in all beings and also in the Absolute.

Worship Me—As the omniscient Lord, free from attachment, aversion, and other evil passions.

Them do I hold etc.—Because they pass their days and nights in the uninterrupted thought of the Lord.

No real contrast is meant between the worshippers of the Personal God and the Impersonal Brahman, as will be explained later on.

Are not the others, then, perfect in yoga? The Lord says that there cannot be any question of their realization of the Godhead:

3-4

And those who have completely controlled their senses and are of even mind under all conditions and thus worship the Imperishable, the Ineffable, the Unmanifest, the Omnipresent, the Incomprehensible, the Immutable, the Unchanging, the Eternal—they, devoted to the welfare of all beings, attain Me alone, and none else.

Those—Referring to the all-renouncing sannyāsis.

Under all conditions—Whether they meet with agreeable or disagreeable conditions, because they see the Lord in everything.

Worship—That is to say, meditate on Brahman, in accordance with the instructions of the scriptures and the teacher, and dwell uninterruptedly in the current of that one thought. An apt illustration is the unbroken stream of oil when it is poured from one vessel to another.

Immutable—The word "Kutastha" in the text means He who dwells in māyā as its Witness, Substratum, and Lord.

Attain Me alone etc.—It needs no emphasizing that the devotees of the Impersonal realize the Godhead alone. It is not necessary to reiterate that they are perfect yogis, since they are one with the Lord Himself. "The man endowed with wisdom I deem to be My very Self." (VII, 18)

But the path of the Personal God is easier for the majority of men.

5

The task of those whose minds are set on the Unmanifest is more difficult; for the ideal of the Unmanifest is hard to attain for those who are embodied.

Unmanifest—The indefinable and incomprehensible Absolute.

Is more difficult—Those who seek the Absolute follow a more difficult discipline than the worshippers of the Per-

sonal God. The former must practise utmost self-control, renounce the world outwardly and inwardly, wipe out all human emotion and desire, and still the mind in the contemplation of the Absolute. The worshippers of the Personal God have a tangible Ideal of the Lord, to whom they can direct their emotion and love.

Those who are embodied—Those who are conscious of their bodies and attached to them.

Obviously no contrast is meant between the followers of the attributeless Absolute and the worshippers of the Personal God, since both attain the same goal. The path of the Absolute is more difficult; for it requires the complete abandonment of all attachment to the body. The followers of the other path regard their bodies as instruments of God and perform their duties dedicating the results to Him. A devotee conscious of his body and ego cannot easily fix his mind on the Absolute. The more a man realizes himself to be incorporeal Spirit, the easier it becomes for him to think of the Lord as Spirit and Consciousness.

There are two classes of spiritual seekers. Some like to retain their egos, which have been purified by the love and knowledge of God, establish a relationship with the Lord, and enjoy communion with Him through meditation, worship, and service of His devotees. They regard the world and all beings as manifestations of the Lord. They follow the path of affirmation. There are others, however, who desire completely to merge their egos in the Absolute. They follow the steep path of renunciation and denial. Their spiritual discipline culminates in their absorption in what is known as nirvikalpa samādhi, a transcendental experience in which the individual soul becomes one with Brahman. It is said in the Hindu scriptures that, in the case of an ordinary mortal, after that all-annihilating experience the body drops off like a dead leaf. But a few special souls, such as an Incarnation of God and His intimate disciples, can return to the relative plane of consciousness after the attainment of nirvikalpa samādhi and live in the world for the fulfilment of a divine mission. While dealing with the world they feel the

presence of an "ego," which is, however, unlike an ordinary ego, because it has been purged of worldliness by the Knowledge of God. Through this "pure ego" they establish an intimate relationship with the Lord and enjoy the company of His devotees. But whenever they want they can merge themselves in the Absolute. They live in the borderland between the Relative and the Absolute. Looking up, they realize the featureless and attributeless Brahman, and looking down, they see the universe of name and form filled with the essence of the Lord.

Both classes of aspirants, the worshippers of the Personal God and the devotees of the Absolute, transcend the sorrow and suffering of the relative world and enjoy the bliss of communion with the Godhead.

Different kinds of liberation are described in the Hindu scriptures. One is called *sājujya mukti,* a state of liberation in which the individual soul becomes totally unified with the Godhead, no trace of individuality being left. This liberation is sought by the jnāni, the follower of the path of knowledge. In the following kinds of liberation the individuality of the soul is retained though it is completely purged of its earthly nature. Attaining *sālokya mukti,* the devotee dwells eternally in the highest heaven with the Lord. In *sāmipya mukti,* the devotee always enjoys the nearness of the Lord, his Beloved. Realizing *sārshti mukti,* the devotee attains equality with the Lord in power and all the divine attributes. The dualists seek one of these three forms of liberation. Peace, blessedness, joy, immortality, absence of worldliness, and freedom from relativity characterize all the forms of liberation.

The worshippers of the Universal Form easily attain perfection through the Lord's grace.

6-7

But those who consecrate all their actions to Me, regarding Me as the Supreme Goal, and who worship Me, meditating on Me with single-minded con-

centration—to them, whose minds are thus absorbed in Me, verily I become ere long, O Pārtha, the Saviour from the death-fraught ocean of the world.

Me—The Lord of the universe.

Single-minded concentration—Because to them the Lord alone is real and the world illusory.

Death-fraught—Life in the world is only another phase of death.

Ocean of the world—It is as hard to cross the world as it is to cross the ocean.

The disciplines of the followers of the Absolute consist in discrimination and renunciation, and also in learning the Truth from the teacher and the scriptures, and reasoning, and contemplation. The devotees of the Universal Form worship the Lord with love, dedicate all actions to Him, and meditate on Him with unswerving devotion. These latter, through the Lord's grace, very soon attain liberation from the suffering and death of mortal life.

Therefore,

8

Fix your mind on Me alone, rest your thought on Me alone, and in Me alone you will live hereafter. Of this there is no doubt.

Mind—The internal organ of knowledge that thinks about the *pros* and *cons* of a matter.

Me—The Lord in His Universal Form.

Thought—The word in the text is "buddhi," which means the determinative faculty, by which doubt created by the mind is destroyed and a decision arrived at.

Hereafter—After the death of the body. If a devotee, while alive, thinks of the Lord alone with all his heart and soul, he attains Him after death.

The Lord suggests a simple discipline for those who cannot follow the hard path:

9

If you are unable to fix your mind steadily on Me, O Dhananjaya, then seek to reach Me by the yoga of constant practice.

The yoga of constant practice—Practice consists in withdrawing the thought from all objects and fixing it, again and again, on one ideal. The "yoga of constant practice" means the steadfastness of mind acquired by such practice.

If a devotee finds it impossible to fix his mind on the Universal Form, he is asked to worship a tangible symbol, such as an image of God, and meditate on it in his heart, and thus through repeated practice acquire a steadiness of thought that can be directed to the Lord.

10

If you are incapable of constant practice, then devote yourself to My service. For even by rendering service to Me you will attain perfection.

My service—Such external forms of worship as repeating the name and the glories of the Lord, listening to His glories sung by others, observing fasts and other austerities, showing reverence to His images, and offering the Lord flowers, food, perfume, and so on; or the service of the Lord may mean any action that is done for His sake only. Through such service purity of mind is attained, which is followed by steadiness, knowledge of the Lord, and realization of Him.

11

If you are unable to do even this, then be self-controlled, surrender the fruit of all action, and take refuge in Me.

Be self-controlled—Control the lower self, or the ego, which craves the fruit of action.

Surrender the fruit etc.—If the devotee does not seek the fruit of action, his mind remains free to remember the Lord.

The practice of indifference to the fruit of action and its surrender to the Lord set the devotee on the spiritual path.

The yoga of desireless action is extolled:

12

Knowledge is better than practice, and meditation is better than knowledge. Renunciation of the fruit of action is better than meditation; peace immediately follows such renunciation.

Knowledge—Of the truth behind things.

Practice—The act of listening to the teachings of the scriptures with a view to obtaining knowledge; or the word may mean the practice of meditation with a firm resolve. Knowledge is better than mere practice that is not accompanied with discrimination.

Meditation is better etc.—Meditation based on knowledge is superior to mere knowledge.

Renunciation of the fruit etc.—When a devotee, practising self-control and seeking refuge in the Lord, renounces the fruit of action, he immediately attains inner calm and peace. For one tranquil in heart the cessation of ignorance comes without delay.

The abandonment of the fruit of action, taught as a means to Divine Bliss, applies to an ignorant person who, unable to follow the paths recommended before, engages in work. This abandonment is extolled in the text because the path of action is intended to be taught here. The renunciation of desires brings peace immediately to the ignorant person engaged in work, and also to the enlightened aspirant who is steadily devoted to meditation. Therefore the renunciation of desires is a common factor in the attainment of peace both for the ignorant and for the enlightened, and hence is extolled by Sri Krishna.

Two methods of worship have been discussed: the worship of the Universal Form and the worship of the immutable Absolute. The former, meant for the beginner, emphasizes action for the Lord's sake and presupposes a distinction between the Lord and the individual soul. The Lord is the deliverer of these worshippers. The other method of worship is meant for the jnānis, who do not see any distinction between the Lord and the individual soul. They do not depend on any external being for their liberation, since they realize that the whole universe lies in the Self. These two paths of worship are different, though in the long run they bring the same result of liberation to their respective followers. Behind the immutable Absolute and the Universal Form lies the same Godhead. The following verses describe the attributes of the worshippers of the Absolute through which they directly attain immortality. Only the all-renouncing sannyāsis can practise these virtues in full.

13-14

He who never hates any being and is friendly and compassionate to all, who is free from the feelings of "I" and "mine" and even-minded in pain and pleasure, who is forbearing, ever content, and steady in contemplation, who is self-controlled and possessed of firm conviction, and who has consecrated his mind and understanding to Me—dear to Me is the one who is thus devoted to Me.

Never hates any being—Even those who cause him pain; for he regards all creatures as himself.

Friendly and compassionate to all—He, a sannyāsi, has given assurance of fearlessness to all. In his heart a universal love dwells, and from it a universal compassion flows.

Even-minded etc.—Pain and pleasure do not cause in him hatred and attachment.

Ever content—He is satisfied, whether he obtains the means of bodily sustenance or not.

Firm conviction—Regarding the essential nature of the Self.

He is a soul of peace with whom all are at peace.

15

He by whom the world is not afflicted and whom the world cannot afflict, he who is free from joy and anger, fear and anxiety—he is dear to Me.

Who is free etc.—Because he is detached from his constantly agitated lower nature, he is free from its waves of joy, fear, anxiety, anger, and desire, and is the embodiment of calm.

16

He who is free from dependence, who is pure and prompt, unconcerned and untroubled, and who has renounced all undertakings—dear to Me is the man who is thus devoted to Me.

Dependence—Upon the body, the senses, objects, and their mutual connections.

Pure—Both outwardly and inwardly. Outward purity is obtained through washing, and inward purity through self-control. Patanjali states that an aspirant desirous of attaining inner purity should show friendship toward the happy, mercy toward the unhappy, gladness toward the good, and indifference toward the evil.

Prompt—Able to decide rightly and instantly about matters demanding immediate action. The word may also mean vigilant.

Unconcerned—Impartial even in the affairs of a friend.

All undertakings—Calculated to secure objects of desire, whether of this world or the next; all egotistic and personal initiative. A devotee lets the divine will flow through him undeflected by his own desires and preferences; and yet for that very reason he is swift and skilful in all actions. The divine will and intelligence working through him enable him to accomplish all actions rightly and promptly.

17

He who rejoices not and hates not, who grieves not and desires not, who has renounced both good and evil and is full of devotion—he is dear to Me.

Rejoices not—On attaining what is desirable.
Hates not—The undesirable.
Grieves not—On parting with a beloved object.
Desires not—The unattained.
Renounced both good and evil—Because a devotee regards all things coming from God as good.

The Lord stresses sameness, desirelessness, and freedom from the claims of the lower egotistic nature as the foundation of spiritual life:

18-19

He who is alike to foe and friend, unaltered in honour and dishonour; who is the same in cold and heat, in pleasure and pain; who is free from attachment, who is unchanged by praise and blame; who is silent, content with whatever he has, homeless, firm of mind, and full of devotion—that man is dear to Me.

Alike to foe and friend etc.—It is a man's attachment to worldly things that fosters the idea of enmity, friendship, etc.
The same in cold and heat etc.—These pairs affect worldly persons alone.
Content with whatever he has—Content with the bare means of sustenance.

The enumeration of the virtues of a sannyāsi is concluded:

20

Exceedingly dear to Me are they who regard Me

as the Supreme Goal and, endowed with faith and devotion, follow this Immortal Dharma.

This Immortal Dharma—The law of life that confers upon its follower the boon of Immortality, and that has been described above, beginning with XII, 13.

Since he who practises the virtues described in XII, 13, and the following verses is exceedingly dear to the Lord, they should be cherished by all seekers of liberation and all those who desire to enjoy the supreme Blessedness.

Thus in the Bhagavad Gītā, the Essence of the Upanishads, the Science of Brahman, the Scripture of Yoga, the Dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna, ends the Twelfth Chapter, entitled:

THE WAY OF DIVINE LOVE

Chapter Thirteen

THE DISCRIMINATION BETWEEN MATTER AND SPIRIT

Arjuna said: Prakriti and Purusha, the Field and the Knower of the Field, knowledge and that which is to be known—all this, O Keśava, I desire to learn.

This verse is omitted in many editions of the Gītā.

All material bodies, sense-organs, and sense-objects are made of Prakriti—Nature, or matter. The aggregate of the body and the senses serves a twofold purpose for living beings: enjoyment of sense-objects and attainment of liberation. This aggregate is now described:

1

The Lord said: This body, O son of Kunti, is called the Field, and he who knows it is called the Knower of the Field by those who describe them.

Body—To be described in verses 5 and 6 of this chapter.

Field—The word in the text is "kshetra," which signifies both "body" and "matter." The body is called "field" because the fruits of action are reaped in it as in a field, or because it is subject to decay.

Knows it—As distinct from the Self, or Spirit.

Knower of the Field—The word in the text is "Kshetrajna," which means the individual soul, which is, in reality, one with the Supreme Soul.

In the seventh chapter Sri Krishna described the two prakritis of the Lord. The inferior prakriti, or matter, consists of three gunas and is divided into eight parts; it entangles the Spirit in the world. The three gunas are sattva, rajas, and

tamas. The superior prakriti is the individualized soul (jiva), who is the Knower of the Field and, in reality, one with the Lord Himself. Through these two prakritis the Supreme Lord creates, sustains, and ultimately dissolves the universe. The thirteenth chapter proposes to describe the two prakritis —the Field and the Knower of the Field—in order to determine finally the nature of the Supreme Lord Himself.

2

And know that I am the Knower in all Fields, O Bhārata; and only the knowledge of the Field and its Knower do I regard as true knowledge.

I—The Supreme Lord.

Knowledge of the Field and its Knower—Knowledge of matter and Spirit.

We see innumerable living beings, ranging from the highest Cosmic Person, or Brahmā, to the meanest worm, dwelling in numberless bodies or "fields." They are the knowers of their respective bodies. These living beings perform various actions, good or bad, and experience their results. They are subject to bondage; through spiritual discipline they ultimately attain liberation. But according to Vedānta the individualized soul is really one with the Supreme Lord. Through ignorance the Supreme Lord, birthless and deathless, becomes associated with the manifold upādhis, or limitations, of bodies. From the standpoint of knowledge, the Knower of the Field is the Supreme Lord and not the *samsāri*, or individualized soul, entangled in the world. Though the Supreme Lord, as the Knower of the Field, dwells in all bodies, yet He is not affected by the traits of these bodies, such as birth, growth, decay, death, and so on; for the idea of His being associated with the body is due to ignorance. Not a single grain of sand in the desert is made wet by all the waters of the mirage one sees there through ignorance. The terms "bondage" and "liberation" cannot be ascribed to the Lord, though it is He alone who dwells in the body. They are used with reference to the individual soul, who is created by igno-

rance and falsely called the Master, or Knower, of the Field, the body.

The salient points of the topics to be discussed:

3

Hear briefly from Me what the Field is, what its nature is, what its modifications are, whence it comes, who its Knower is, and what His powers are.

Inspired and intuitive knowledge, as also reason and philosophy, have described the nature of Spirit and matter.

4

All this has been sung by sages in many and different ways, in various distinctive hymns, and also in well reasoned and convincing passages indicative of Brahman.

In many and different ways—In various treatises on yoga.
Hymns—Of the Vedas.

The Field is described:

5-6

The great elements, I-consciousness, understanding, and the unmanifested; the ten senses, the mind, the five objects of the senses;

Desire, hatred, pleasure, pain, the aggregate, intelligence, and fortitude—this, briefly stated, is the Field together with its modifications.

Great elements—The five bhutas—ether, air, fire, water, and earth—in their subtle form as originally evolved. They pervade all the modifications of matter. See note on VII, 4.
I-consciousness—The cause of the five elements.

Understanding—The word "buddhi" in the text is defined as the determining faculty. It is the cause of I-consciousness.

Unmanifested—The word in the text is "avyakta." It is the energy, or śakti, of the Lord, spoken of in VII, 14.

Ten senses—Five organs of perception and five organs of action. The former consist of ears, eyes, nose, tongue, and skin. The latter consist of hands, feet, vocal organ, and the organs of evacuation and generation.

Mind—The inner organ, whose functions are doubt and volition.

Five objects of the senses—Sound and the rest. They comprise the five gross elements.

Desire—This is a property of the antahkarana, the inner sense-organ.

Hatred, pleasure, pain—These belong to the category of matter because they are objects of knowledge.

Aggregrate—The combination of the body and the senses.

Intelligence—A mental state that manifests itself in the aggregate. It is a reflection of Ātman, or Consciousness, and is material in nature, for it is knowable. One is aware of the presence or absence of intelligence.

Fortitude—A state of mind by which the depressed body and mind are upheld. It is also material in nature, for it is an object of knowledge. One is conscious of its presence or absence. According to Vedānta the knower, or subject, is Spirit, and the object of knowledge is matter.

The five great elements, I-consciousness (ahamkāra), understanding (buddhi), and the unmanifested (avyakta) are known as Prakriti, or Nature, with its eightfold division.

The categories beginning with the great elements and ending in the five objects of the senses comprise the twenty-four cosmic principles of Sāmkhya philosophy.

The categories beginning with desire and ending in fortitude are described by Vaiśeshika philosophy as the attributes of Ātman. But according to Vedānta they are the attributes of matter.

Matter, or the Field, referred to in the first verse of this chapter as the body, is thus described with all its modifications.

It will be said presently that through a knowledge of the powers of the Knower of the Field, or the Supreme Lord, immortality is attained. Aspirants must cultivate certain virtues in order to be qualified for the knowledge of the Lord, who alone is the object of knowledge. These virtues, described below, are designated as knowledge because they are the means of attaining Knowledge.

7-11

Humility, modesty, non-violence, forbearance, and uprightness; service to the teacher, purity, steadfastness, and self-control;

Dispassion toward sense-objects, absence of ego, perception of the evil of birth, death, old age, sickness, and pain;

Non-attachment, non-identification of self with children, wife, home, and the rest, unvarying evenness of mind in the midst of agreeable and disagreeable events;

Unswerving devotion to Me through constant meditation on non-separation, resorting to solitude, aversion to the society of men;

Constancy in the knowledge of the Self, and an insight into the object of the knowledge of Truth—this is declared to be knowledge, and all that is contrary to it is ignorance.

Forbearance—Not being affected when injured by others.

Teacher—Who teaches the means of attaining liberation.

Dispassion toward sense-objects—Toward objects seen or heard of.

Old age—The evil of old age consists in the decay of intelligence, power, and strength.

Pain—Whether arising from factors inherent in oneself or caused by an external agent or produced by supernatural forces. From the perception of the evil of pain in birth, death, and the rest, arises indifference to physical pleasures. Then the senses are directed toward the inmost Self for a glimpse

of the Divine Light. The perception of the evil of pain in birth, death, and so on, is spoken of as knowledge because such perception leads to the Knowledge of Reality. According to the materialistic point of view, life in the world, in spite of its many dark shadows, is worth while; but according to the spiritual point of view, life as we lead it in the world is a sorry thing, though it brings us many illusory and transient joys.

Non-identification of self etc.—An intense attachment to son, wife, and so on, makes one feel happy or miserable when they are happy or miserable.

Unvarying evenness of mind etc.—Due to the consciousness that the Self, dwelling within, is impervious to the shocks of external events.

Meditation on non-separation—A steady, unwavering meditation on the Lord with the idea that there is no being higher and therefore He is our sole Refuge.

Solitude—A wood, the sand-bank of a river, or a temple is generally helpful for the practice of meditation.

Society of men—Unenlightened and undisciplined worldly people.

Constancy in the knowledge of the Self—To meditate on transient phenomena is to accept mortality. The soul, a victim of appearance, misses its divine nature and goes on whirling about in the cycle of births and deaths of its bodies.

Insight into the object etc.—The end of knowledge is moksha, the cessation of mortal existence; it is the attainment of immortality.

All that is contrary etc.—Such as pride, hypocrisy, cruelty, impatience, insincerity, and the like. All this is ignorance and therefore should be avoided as tending to the perpetuation of samsāra.

What is it that is realized through the knowledge described above?

12

I will now describe that which ought to be known, through the knowing of which one attains Immortality.

It is the Supreme Brahman, which is without beginning and is said to be neither being nor non-being.

It is stated in the text that Brahman cannot be described as "being" or "non-being." Sat, or "being," is used with reference to an object that can be proved to exist by words or the senses. An object the existence of which cannot be proved by words or the senses is "asat," or "non-being." Thus a pot can be an object of consciousness accompanied with the idea of existence (when it stands before a man), or an object of consciousness accompanied with the idea of non-existence (when it is removed). Brahman is beyond the reach of the senses. It cannot be, like a pot, an object of consciousness accompanied with the idea of either existence or non-existence, and therefore It is said to be neither "being" nor "non-being." Brahman can be known through the evidence of the scriptures, which is based on the direct and intuitive experience of the seer.

Brahman cannot be denoted by such a word as "sat," or "being"; for a word employed to denote a thing signifies the thing as associated with a certain *genus* (such as *cow* or *horse*), a certain *quality* (such as *black* or *white*), a certain *act* (such as *to cook* or *to teach*), or a certain *mode of relation* (such as *landlord* or *cattleman*). Brahman is inexpressible by words because It belongs to no genus and because It is devoid of action, qualities, and relations.

Brahman, being inaccessible to word or thought, might be regarded as asat, or non-being. To prevent this mistake the Lord proceeds to declare Its reality as manifested through the upādhis, the senses of living beings. Brahman exists as the inmost Self of all, as the source of all activities of the senses, as the source whence arises our consciousness of existence with reference to all illusory objects in the relative world, and as the Lord of the universe. There must be a self-conscious principle behind the activities of insentient objects such as the body and senses.

13

Its hands and feet are everywhere; Its eyes, heads, and faces are everywhere; Its ears are everywhere; Its existence envelops all.

Its existence envelops all—Brahman pervades all beings as existence and consciousness.

That Brahman exists is indicated by the activity of the sense-organs; for there must be consciousness behind their functioning. The sense-organs act in virtue of the mere presence of Brahman, or consciousness. Matter, or the Field (kshetra)—consisting of body, sense-organs, and so on—is the upādhi, or limiting adjunct, of Brahman, or the Knower of the Field. The manifold, falsely imagined in Brahman, or Spirit, owing to the variety of the upādhis, is illusory. Hands, feet, and so on, are ascribed to Brahman in a figurative sense. Through them Its existence is indicated. Brahman is taught by the method of superimposition and negation; that is to say, upādhis are falsely superimposed upon It and then negated through the process of discrimination, revealing Pure Consciousness.

It must not be supposed that Brahman is really endowed with the upādhis, or limitations, of body, sense-organs, and the rest. They are merely superimposed upon It.

14

It shines through the functions of all the senses, and yet It is devoid of senses. It is unattached, and yet It sustains all. It is devoid of gunas, and yet It enjoys them.

It shines through the functions etc.—The term "senses," which comprises the organs of both perception and action, includes as well the mind and intelligence (buddhi), which also form upādhis of Brahman. Brahman manifests Itself through the upādhis of the outer and inner senses, that is to

say, through their functions, viz., determination, purposes, thoughts, hearing, speech, and the like. Brahman functions, *as it were,* through the functions of all the senses. This functioning of Brahman is an appearance. It does not actually function when the senses function. "Though without hands and feet, yet It moves swiftly and It grasps. It sees without the eye. It hears without the ear." (*Svetasvetāra Upanishad,* III, 19)

It is unattached—Because Brahman is incorporeal.

It sustains all—Brahman permeates all objects as "sat," Existence. No object can be imagined to exist without "Existence." Even an illusion must have a basis for its existence. A mirage cannot exist without the basis of the desert. Hence Brahman sustains all illusory objects.

It is devoid of gunas etc.—The gunas belong to Prakriti, or matter. Brahman is free from them. Yet the experience of the gunas, in the form of sound and other objects, by the soul is possible because it is animated by consciousness, which is the very nature of Brahman. Therefore the existence of Brahman is indicated from the experience of objects by the individualized soul. That Brahman enjoys the gunas is used in a figurative sense.

Further,

15

It is without and within all beings. It is unmoving and also moving. It is incomprehensible because It is subtle. It is far away, and yet It is near.

Without and within—It is both the external body and the inmost Self. As gold forms the outside and inside of a gold ornament, or as water forms the outside and inside of a wave, so Brahman pervades the inside and outside of the macrocosm and the microcosm.

Unmoving and also moving—The moving and unmoving objects form the upādhis of Brahman. Just as a rope may appear as a snake, so Brahman appears as both moving and unmoving bodies.

Subtle—Beyond the reach of the senses.

Far away—To the unenlightened, who imagine It to be millions of miles away and unknowable even through the efforts of billions of years.

It is near—To the enlightened, for they realize It to be the inmost Self of all.

Brahman is the one Spirit in all and the Cause of the universe.

16

It is indivisible, and yet It is, as it were, divided among beings. That Knowable Brahman is the Sustainer of all beings, and also their Devourer and Generator.

It is indivisible, and yet It is etc.—An instance of this is ākāśa, or space, which, though indivisible, appears to be divided according to its association with various upādhis, such as a jar, a pot, or a pitcher. Thus one speaks of the space inside a jar or the space inside a pot. Sky-scrapers also seem to divide the indivisible sky. Though Brahman is one and indivisible, yet It appears to be different in different bodies.

Knowable—A reference to verse 12.

Sustainer—During the period when the universe is sustained.

Devourer—At the time of dissolution.

Generator—At the time of creation, or manifestation.

The illusion of a snake is produced by the presence of a rope; the snake is seen to exist because the rope is there; and it ultimately merges in the rope when the real nature of the object is known. So also all the beings of the universe come from Brahman at the time of creation, are sustained by It at the time of preservation, and merge in It at the time of destruction. As in the case of the illusion of the snake in the rope all that is real is the rope, so in this illusory universe all that is real is Brahman.

An objection may be raised that Brahman is darkness, inasmuch as It is not perceived though existing everywhere. It is not so. Brahman is the Illuminer of all.

17

The Light even of lights, It is said to be beyond darkness. As knowledge, the object of knowledge, and the goal of knowledge, It is set firm in the hearts of all.

The Light even of lights—The existence of Brahman can be recognized as the Light illumining the sun, moon, and so on, and also the mind, reason (buddhi), and the rest. "That Light illumined by which the sun shines." (*Taittiriya Brāhmana.*) "By Its light all this shines." (*Svetasvetāra Upanishad*, VI, 14)

Beyond darkness—Uncontaminated by ajnāna, or nescience.

Goal of knowledge—When Brahman is realized, It forms the fruit of knowledge.

Set firm in the hearts of all—These three (knowledge, the object of knowledge, and the goal of knowledge) are implanted pre-eminently in the heart of every living being. There alone they are clearly manifested. Brahman is within everyone; It is not merely in heaven.

The topic is concluded:

18

Thus briefly have been set forth the Field and also knowledge and the object of knowledge. My devotee who understands this becomes worthy of My state.

Field—Described in verses 5-6.

Knowledge—Described in verses 7-11.

Object of knowledge—Described in verses 12-17.

My devotee—Who regards the Supreme Lord as the soul of everything and who knows that all that one sees or hears or touches is the Lord.

My state—The ultimate liberation.

One who understands the Field, knowledge, and the object of knowledge knows the whole doctrine of the Vedas and the Gītā.

The two prakritis of the Lord, the superior and the inferior, have been described in the seventh chapter. It has also been said that all created beings are born of them. (VII, 6) *This subject is further elucidated:*

19

Know that Prakriti and Purusha are both without beginning; and know, too, that all forms and gunas are born of Prakriti.

Prakriti—Inert Nature, or matter.

Purusha—Soul, or Spirit, as opposed to matter.

Without beginning—Prakriti and Purusha are the two aspects, or natures, of Iśvara, the Lord. As the Lord is without beginning, so His natures, too, are without beginning. His very Lordship consists in His possessing these two natures, Prakriti and Purusha, by which He creates, preserves, and dissolves the universe.

Forms—From intelligence (buddhi) down to the gross body.

Gunas—Sattva, rajas, and tamas, which manifest themselves in the form of pleasure, pain, delusion, and so on.

Are born of Prakriti—Prakriti is māyā, the śakti, or power, of the Lord. It is the cause of the manifestation of the relative universe. Since Prakriti, or māyā, is the eternal source of all forms and gunas, Brahman remains ever changeless and immutable.

The functions of Prakriti and Purusha:

20

Prakriti is said to be the cause of the generation of the body and the organs, and Purusha is said to be the cause of the experience of pleasure and pain.

Cause—Because Prakriti is the material from which the body and the organs are produced. Kapila and other philosophers hold this opinion.

Body—The five elements out of which the body is made, and the five sense-objects, are included under the term "body," or "kārya," used in the text.

Organs—These are thirteen, namely, the five organs of perception, the five organs of action, the mind, intelligence (buddhi), and I-consciousness (ahamkāra). Pleasure, pain, delusion, and the rest, which are born of the three gunas of Prakriti, are included under the term "organs" (karana), since they cannot exist independently of the sense-organs.

Purusha—It is synonymous with jiva (the individualized soul), Kshetrajna (the Knower of the Field), and bhoktā (the enjoyer). Obviously the Purusha does not here signify the Paramātman, or Highest Self. It is here an intelligent principle and a conditioned being.

Purusha and Prakriti are stated to be the cause of samsāra, or phenomenal existence. Prakriti transforms itself into body and senses, as also into pleasure, pain, and so on, and Purusha experiences pleasure and pain. This conjunction between Purusha and Prakriti—due to ignorance—makes relative life possible. Even though the Purusha, the Soul, identifies Himself with the body and appears to experience pleasure and pain, yet in reality He remains unchanging. It is this apparent experience which constitutes His illusory world, or samsāra, and which makes Him a samsāri, or phenomenal being.

How does the birthless and immutable Ātman experience pleasure and pain?

21

Purusha, embodied in Prakriti, experiences the gunas born of Prakriti. It is attachment to these gunas that is the cause of His birth in good and evil wombs.

Purusha, embodied in Prakriti—It is due to avidyā, ignorance, that the Purusha identifies Himself with the body and senses, which are the transformations of Prakriti.

Experiences the gunas—The gunas manifest themselves as pleasure, pain, and delusion. On account of identification with Prakriti, the Purusha thinks He is happy, miserable, deluded, wise, and so on.

It is attachment etc.—Identification with pleasure, pain, and delusion is responsible for the Purusha's birth in good and evil bodies.

Good and evil wombs—Good wombs are those of gods and the like; evil wombs are those of lower animals.

Avidyā, or ignorance, and kāma, or attachment to the gunas, together constitute the cause of samsāra, or relative existence. The aspirant seeking liberation should avoid them both. Ignorance is to be removed by knowledge, the knowledge of the Field and the Knower of the Field as imparted in the beginning of the chapter. Attachment is to be destroyed by cultivating vairāgya, or dispassion. To renounce the illusory world is the injunction of the Gītā.

Purusha is entangled in the world on account of His ignorance. But this entanglement is only apparent and not real. His real nature is described:

22

The Supreme Spirit in the body is said to be the one who is the Witness and the Approver, the Supporter and the Enjoyer, and who is the Sovereign Lord and the Highest Self.

Witness—The word "upadrashtri" in the text technically signifies an expert in a sacrificial act, who sits by the side of the priests and the sacrificer but does not take an active part in the sacrifice. He merely witnesses what is right or wrong in the actions of the sacrificer and the priests.

Approver—The Self expresses approbation or satisfaction

concerning the actions of the body, senses, mind, and the rest. Being a witness, It does not stand in the way of the body and senses engaged in their respective activities.

Supporter—The Self is called the Supporter because the body, senses, mind, and the rest, reflect Its intelligence and thus perform activities to serve the purpose of the individualized self.

Enjoyer—The Self is called the Enjoyer for the following reason: It is of the nature of eternal Intelligence. All the different states of mind—characterized by pleasure, pain, or delusion—become manifest on account of the intelligence of the Self.

Sovereign Lord—As one with the universe and independent of everything.

Highest Self—It is called the highest because It is superior to body, senses, mind, and all material adjuncts. The topic will be further discussed in XV, 17.

The result of Self-knowledge:

23

He who thus knows Purusha and Prakriti, along with the gunas, is not born again, howsoever he may comport himself.

Thus knows Purusha—As his very Self and as the basic Reality underlying all manifestations, such as the universal or the individual soul.

And Prakriti—As indefinable and beginningless nescience, which is destroyed by the Knowledge of the Self.

Is not born again—The absence of Self-knowledge is the cause of embodiment.

Howsoever he may etc.—Whether he is engaged in prescribed duties or in those forbidden by law. If liberation is possible for such a person, then it goes without saying that one who stands firm in the path of duty obtains liberation if he has also been endowed with Self-knowledge.

Different paths lead to Self-knowledge. However arrived at, this Knowledge carries us beyond death to Immortality.

24

Some by meditation perceive the Self in themselves through the mind, some by devotion to knowledge, and some by devotion to work.

By meditation etc.—This path is followed by the highest class of aspirants. Meditation is defined as withdrawing the hearing, seeing, and the functioning of the other senses into the mind away from sound, form, and other objects; next withdrawing the mind into the inmost Intelligence; and then contemplating the Intelligence with undeviating concentration. Meditation is continuous thinking, and the mind of one absorbed in it, like an unbroken stream of flowing oil, dwells on the ideal uninterruptedly. Through meditation the yogi beholds the Self, the inmost Intelligence, in the self, the buddhi, by the self, or mind, refined and made one-pointed by contemplation and self-control.

Devotion to knowledge—The word "sāmkhya" in the text denotes knowledge attained through philosophical discrimination between the Self and Nature. The yogis devoted to the path of knowledge realize that Ātman is distinct from Nature and its three gunas and is the detached Witness of their actions.

Devotion to work—Which consists in performing action for the satisfaction of the Lord alone. Through such unselfish action the mind becomes pure and the aspirant ultimately attains Knowledge.

The paths of meditation, knowledge, and work are prescribed for the three classes of aspirants, namely, the superior, mediocre, and inferior.

The path of liberation for those aspirants who are of very low understanding:

25

And there are yet some who do not know It by these means. They hear of It from others and worship. They too pass beyond death through their devotion to what they have heard.

It—The Self.

From others—From teachers or holy men, who tell them the method of meditation.

Worship—In full faith.

Death—Life in the world is inseparable from death.

They are ignorant and for the attainment of liberation depend entirely on the authority of others' instructions. They too succeed.

It has been stated that the knowledge of the identity of the individual soul and the Lord leads to liberation. The reason is stated:

26

Whatever is born—whether animate or inanimate—know, O Bhārata prince, that it is through union of the Field and the Knower of the Field.

Union—What is the nature of this union between the Field and the Knower of the Field, matter and Spirit, body and Soul? Matter and Spirit are entirely opposed to each other in nature; Spirit is incorporeal. Hence the union between them is not like the union between two material objects. Vedānta philosophy describes the relationship between matter and Spirit, or object and Subject, by the term "adhyāsa," which means "false superimposition of one thing upon another." The attributes of matter are superimposed upon Spirit and *vice versa*. This superimposition is due to māyā, or absence of discrimination. It is like the illusion of a snake in a rope, or a mirage in the desert. In such illusions the attributes of the snake or the mirage are

superimposed upon the rope and the desert. This unreal relationship, created by ignorance, conjures up before our vision the manifold of the relative world.

Now a description is given of right knowledge, which destroys ignorance, the cause of embodiment, and enables one to attain liberation:

27

He who sees the Supreme Lord abiding alike in all beings, and not perishing when they perish—verily he alone sees.

Abiding alike—As Sat, or Reality.

All beings—From the highest deity to a grain of sand. The same Divine Spirit dwells in all. The material form is only a mask. The difference between one object and another, from the relative standpoint, lies in the degree of manifestation of the Spirit. In a saint this Spirit is highly manifested, and in a lowly object It is hidden.

The result of right knowledge:

28

Because he sees the Lord present alike everywhere, he does not injure Self by self, and thus he reaches the supreme state.

An ignorant person does not see the Self in others and, owing to false knowledge, regards the non-Self (such as body and mind) as the Self. Identifying the true Self with the body, he engages in good and evil actions and is born again and again to reap their results. Thus through ignorance he repeatedly injures his Self by identifying it with a new body. Through right knowledge he sees the Self as detached from the body and thus attains supreme liberation.

How can the one Lord abide alike in all beings, since they, endowed with different qualities, act in different ways?

29

He who sees that all actions are done only by Prakriti and that the Self is actionless—verily, he alone sees.

Prakriti—The māyā, or śakti, or power, of the Lord, transformed into body, senses, and so on.

Realization of the unity of existence leads to the attainment of Brahman.

30

When he sees that the manifold nature of beings is centred in the One and that all evolution is from that One alone, he becomes one with Brahman.

Manifold nature of beings etc.—All the various classes of beings abide in Brahman, or the Self. This is the realization of the essential unity of the universe and the Self.

All evolution is from that etc.—Compare: "From the Self is life, from the Self is desire, from the Self is love, from the Self is ākāśa, from the Self is light, from the Self are the waters, from the Self is manifestation and disappearance, from the Self is the soul." (*Chhāndogya Upanishad,* VII, xxvi, 1)

Becomes one with Brahman—He realizes the all-pervading nature of the Self because the cause of all limitation has been destroyed by the knowledge of unity with Brahman.

This verse refutes the view of Sāmkhya philosophy that Nature, or Prakriti, and its manifestations are quite distinct from Purusha, or Spirit, and that Prakriti exists independent of Purusha.

If the Supreme Lord is the self of all embodied beings, how can He be unaffected by their physical traits?

31

Having no beginning and possessing no gunas, this supreme and imperishable Self, O son of Kunti, neither acts nor is stained by action even while dwelling in the body.

Having no beginning—Being without any cause.

Imperishable—Because It is without parts and qualities.

Stained by action—That is to say, affected by the fruit of action. This is due to the fact that the Lord is not the doer of action.

If the Spirit dwelling in the body does not act and is not tainted by the result of action, then, it may be asked, who is the agent of the action and the reaper of its fruit? There is no embodied self distinct from the Supreme Lord, and the Supreme Lord is actionless. The answer is: It is Prakriti that acts. (V, 14) Through illusion arises the idea of the action, the doer, and the result of action. No action really exists in the Supreme Lord. From the standpoint of Reality there exists neither good nor evil. When the knowledge of the unity of the Lord and the universe is veiled by ignorance, there arises the idea of the pairs of opposites, and also the idea of action characterized by agency, instrument, and result.

An illustration:

32

As the ākāśa that pervades all things is not stained, because of its subtlety, even so the Self dwelling in the body everywhere is not stained.

The ākāśa, or ether, is so subtle that it pervades all things without obstruction and is not affected by the good or evil qualities of the objects it pervades. Likewise, the

Supreme Self, dwelling in the bodies of gods and angels, men and animals, plants and stones, is not affected by their natural qualities.

The illuminer is not affected by the objects It illumines.

33

As the one sun illumines the whole world, so does He who dwells in the body, O Bhārata, illumine the whole body.

By the illustration of the sun it is shown that, like the sun, the Self is one and unsoiled, that is to say, untouched by the traits of those It illumines.

The chapter is concluded:

34

They who perceive with the eye of wisdom this distinction between the Field and the Knower of the Field, and also the deliverance from Prakriti, the cause of all beings—they attain the Supreme.

Eye of wisdom—Self-knowledge.

Prakriti—Avidyā, or ignorance, which is the material cause of all beings.

The means of deliverance from ignorance are meditation, renunciation, and other spiritual disciplines.

Thus in the Bhagavad Gītā, the Essence of the Upanishads, the Science of Brahman, the Scripture of Yoga, the Dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna, ends the Thirteenth Chapter, entitled:

THE DISCRIMINATION BETWEEN MATTER AND SPIRIT

Chapter Fourteen

THE DISCRIMINATION OF THE THREE GUNAS

1

The Lord said: Once more I will expound that Supreme Knowledge, the most exalted of all forms of knowledge, by gaining which all the sages have attained highest perfection after passing from this world.

From this world—From the bondage of the body.

The connexion with the preceding chapter is this: It has been stated that matter and Spirit—both dependent on the Lord—are the cause of the universe. The soul, on account of its attachment to the gunas, is born in various bodies, good or bad. The fourteenth chapter deals with the gunas.

2

They who, having devoted themselves to this Knowledge, have partaken of My nature, are not born at the time of creation, nor are they troubled at the time of dissolution.

Creation—The appearance of a new cycle.

Dissolution—The end of a cycle, when names and forms merge in Prakriti. It is a temporary pause followed by a new evolution. All the bound souls go into a sleep state during the dissolution and are born in new bodies during the new creation according to their past action.

The union of matter and Spirit, under the control of the Supreme Lord, causes the birth of all beings. The view of

Sāmkhya philosophy that they can create independently of the Lord is refuted.

3

The Great Nature is My womb; in that I place the germ, and thence are born all beings, O Bhārata.

Great Nature—The Great Nature, or Prakriti, or māyā ("Brahma" in the text), is an aspect of the Lord and inheres in Him.

Germ—The seed that impregnates the Great Nature and gives rise to Hiranyagarbha, the Golden Egg, which in turn produces all beings. During the period of dissolution the soul (Kshetrajna), still under the influence of nescience, remains merged in Prakriti. At the time of the next creation the Lord endows the soul with a reflection of His Intelligence and unites it with an appropriate body determined by its past karma.

The Lord is the Father and Mother of the universe. Matter and Spirit are His two aspects and inhere in Him. As the Over-soul, He casts the seed; as the Mother, the Nature-soul, He receives it. From the embryo thus formed, from Hiranyagarbha, are produced all created beings.

Not only at the beginning of a cycle does the Lord unite matter and Spirit in order to cause the birth of created beings, but of every birth that takes place on earth He is the ultimate cause.

4

Whatever form is produced, O son of Kunti, in any womb, the Great Nature is its womb, and I am the seed-giving Father.

Whatever form—Pertaining to gods, angels, men, animals, birds, or trees.

Created beings are produced from the union of Purusha and Prakriti, by the power of the Lord. The Soul, or Spirit, becomes entangled in the world by its contact with the body, or matter.

5

The gunas—sattva, rajas, and tamas—which are born of Prakriti, bind fast in the body the immortal, embodied soul, O mighty Arjuna.

Gunas—See note on II, 45.

Bind fast—The bondage of the soul is not real; for the soul, in reality, is ever free.

Embodied soul—He who dwells in the body and appears to be identified with it.

The nature of sattva and the way it binds:

6

Of these, sattva, being stainless, is luminous and healthful. It binds, O sinless Arjuna, by creating attachment to happiness and attachment to knowledge.

Stainless—Because through sattva one can destroy the deluding power of māyā.

Luminous—On account of its purity, sattva is the perfect mirror to reflect spiritual bliss.

Healthful—Of the nature of peace and serenity.

A man under the influence of sattva becomes attached to happiness and knowledge and says, "I am happy; I have attained knowledge." Happiness and knowledge are attributes of mind, which is a form of matter. They belong to the category of the object and pertain to the kshetra. (XIII, 6) The Self, which is of the nature of freedom and totally unattached, becomes bound by identification with matter. This is how sattva binds a soul to the world.

The nature of rajas and how it binds:

7

Know that rajas is the essence of passion and the cause of thirst and attachment. It binds fast the embodied soul, O son of Kunti, by attachment to action.

The essence of passion—Like a dye, it stains the stainless soul and makes it appear permeated with desires.

Action—Productive of visible and invisible results. It is thirst and attachment that impel a worldly person to action. Thirst is directed to an object not yet attained, and attachment, to what has already been attained.

Though the Self is actionless, yet rajas makes It feel, "I am the doer."

The nature of tamas and how it binds:

8

And know further that tamas is born of ignorance and that it deludes all embodied creatures. It binds fast, O Bhārata, by inadvertence, indolence, and sleep.

Ignorance—The veiling power of māyā. The other power of māyā is the projecting power, which functions mainly through rajas. Māyā is armed with these two powers.

Under the influence of tamas one becomes inattentive, slothful, and inert.

The respective functions of the three gunas:

9

Sattva binds one to happiness, and rajas to action, O Bhārata; whereas tamas veils knowledge and binds one to inadvertence.

Through the influence of sattva man feels happy in spite of the presence of grief and suffering; through the influence of rajas man is impelled to action in spite of his being happy; through the influence of tamas man is deprived of the power of discrimination and neglects his imperative duties.

How do the gunas function in an individual?

10

Sattva asserts itself by prevailing over rajas and tamas, O Bhārata; rajas asserts itself by prevailing over sattva and tamas; and tamas asserts itself by prevailing over sattva and rajas.

When one of the gunas prevails over the other two, it produces its own effect. Thus sattva produces knowledge and happiness, rajas causes attachment and impels one to action, and tamas veils discrimination and causes inertia and inadvertence.

What is the characteristic mark by which to know that sattva is predominant?

11

When the light of knowledge shines through all the gateways of the body, then it may be known that sattva has prevailed.

Gateways—That is to say, the senses, which are, for the soul, the gateways of perception.

The cultivation of sattva is, no doubt, the highest virtue in the relative world. But it must not be mistaken for liberation, or the Highest Good, which consists in transcending all the gunas. If too much cherished, sattva soon degenerates into rajas and tamas, which are always present, in however small proportion, along with sattva.

The characteristic marks of predominant rajas:

12

Greed, activity, enterprise, unrest, longing—these arise, O lord of the Bhāratas, when rajas prevails.

The characteristic marks of predominant tamas:

13

Darkness, indolence, inadvertence, delusion—all these arise, O descendant of Kuru, when tamas prevails.

Darkness—Absence of discrimination.

Life after death is influenced by the gunas.

14

If the embodied soul meets with death when sattva prevails, it goes to the spotless realms of those who know the Highest.

Spotless realms—The exalted heavens where tamas and rajas can never assert themselves.

Who know the Highest—Who worship such deities as Hiranyagarbha and Brahmā.

15

If the embodied soul meets with death when rajas prevails, it is born among those who are attached to action; and if it meets with death when tamas prevails, it is born in the wombs of creatures devoid of reason.

Those who are attached to action—That is to say, men.

Creatures devoid of reason—Beasts and the like.

A summary of the preceding verses:

16

The fruit of a good action is said to be good and clean; the fruit of rajas is pain; and the fruit of tamas is ignorance.

Good action—An action characterized by sattva.

The happiness that accrues from sattva is a reflection of the Bliss of Brahman.

The functions of the gunas are summed up:

17

From sattva springs knowledge, and from rajas, greed; from tamas spring inadvertence, delusion, and ignorance.

From sattva springs knowledge—It is for this reason that the fruit of action influenced by sattva is characterized by happiness. This knowledge is only a means to the attainment of Self-knowledge.

From rajas, greed—It is for this reason that the fruit of action influenced by rajas bears pain.

18

Those who are established in sattva go upward; those who are moved by rajas remain in the middle; and those who are steeped in tamas, being weighted by the tendencies of the lowest guna, go downward.

Upward—Into the realms of higher beings.

In the middle—Among men.

Tendencies of the lowest guna—Such as inertia, indolence, and so on.

Downward—To the level of beasts.

Through different births the Spirit experiences pleasure, pain, and delusion on account of Its attachment to the three gunas. Liberation is possible only through right knowledge, which is now taught:

19

When a man of insight beholds no agent other than the gunas, and also knows Him who is beyond the gunas, he attains My being.

No agent other than the gunas—It is the gunas that transform themselves into bodies, senses, and sense-objects. The agent, the instrument, and the result of action are only modifications of the gunas and belong to Prakriti.

Him—The Lord, who dwells in man as his inmost Self. He is the Witness of the gunas and their functions.

Attains My being—Then his identity with Brahman becomes manifest.

The result of detachment from the gunas is the attainment of Immortality.

20

When the embodied soul has risen above the three gunas of which its body is made, it gains deliverance from birth, death, old age, and pain and becomes immortal.

Has risen above—That is to say, while living in the body.

Gains deliverance—Even before giving up the body.

21

Arjuna said: What are the marks, O Lord, of the man who has risen above the three gunas? What is his conduct? And how does he rise above the gunas?

22-25

The Lord said: He who hates not light, activity, and delusion when they are present, nor longs for them, O Pāndava, when they are absent;

He who, sitting like one unconcerned, is unmoved by the gunas, who remains firm and never wavers, knowing that the gunas alone are active;

He who dwells in the Self and regards alike pleasure and pain, who looks on a clod, a stone, and a piece of gold as of equal worth, who remains the same amidst agreeable and disagreeable things, who is a man of wisdom, and who sees no difference between praise and blame;

He who is the same in honour and dishonour, the same to friend and foe, and who has renounced all undertakings—such a man is said to have risen above the gunas.

Light—The effect of sattva.
Activity—The effect of rajas.
Delusion—The effect of tamas.

He who hates not light etc.—The man of right knowledge does not hate the effects of the three gunas when they clearly present themselves as objects of consciousness, nor does he long for them when they have disappeared. This answers Arjuna's first question. These are marks that others cannot perceive; they can be perceived only by the individual in whom they appear. No man can perceive the hatred or desire that presents itself to another man's consciousness.

The gunas alone are active—Since the gunas transform themselves into body, senses, and objects, all actions are only the functioning of the gunas. The Self is the detached Witness.

Has renounced all undertakings—He initiates no action, but leaves all works to be done by the gunas.

These attributes, described in XIV, 22-25, have to be acquired by special effort prior to the attainment of Self-

knowledge. The aspirant for Self-knowledge should therefore cultivate these virtues, as they are the means of attaining it. But on the birth of Self-knowledge, when the aspirant has become a jivanmukta, liberated while still living in the human body, all the virtues mentioned here form part and parcel of his nature and serve as marks of liberation, which he can perceive for himself.

How does one pass beyond the three gunas?

26

And he who worships Me with the yoga of undeviating love rises above the gunas and becomes fit to be one with Brahman.

Me—The Lord, who dwells in the hearts of all as their inmost Self.

Love—Which is based on the knowledge of the Lord.

To be one with Brahman—That is to say, he is ready for liberation.

Why?

27

For I am the Abode of Brahman, the Immortal and the Immutable, and of the Eternal Dharma, and of Absolute Bliss.

I—The inmost Self, in whom Brahman, the Supreme Self, abides.

Dharma—Law and righteousness.

Thus in the Bhagavad Gītā, the Essence of the Upanishads, the Science of Brahman, the Scripture of Yoga, the Dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna, ends the Fourteenth Chapter, entitled:

THE DISCRIMINATION OF THE THREE GUNAS

Chapter Fifteen

THE WAY TO THE SUPREME SELF

1

The Lord said: They speak of an imperishable Aśvattha Tree with its root above and branches below. Its leaves are the Vedas, and he who knows it knows the Vedas.

They—The scriptures.

Imperishable—The Tree of samsāra, or cosmic existence, rests on a continuous series of births and deaths without beginning or end. This Tree cannot be cut down except by the knowledge and experience of man's identity with Brahman.

Aśvattha—*Lit.*, that which does not endure till the next day. The phenomenal world is compared to the aśvattha tree on account of its changing nature.

Root above—In an ordinary tree the tap-root extends downward; but in the Tree of the World the tap-root is above. This root is Brahman with māyā (Saguna Brahman), since the Immutable Absolute (Nirguna Brahman) is beyond the category of causality. The root is described as "above" because Brahman with māyā is very subtle and very great, and is supreme over all things.

Branches—The mahat (cosmic mind), ahamkāra (I-consciousness), tanmātrās (the five subtle elements), and the other cosmic principles are its branches, extending downward. As the branches go downward they become grosser.

Its leaves are the Vedas—Just as the leaves protect a tree, so the Vedas (especially the sacrificial portion) serve to protect the Tree of the World by formulating its dharma (meritorious action) and adharma (the opposite of dharma), with their causes and fruits, and also showing the way to prosperity and well-being in the relative world. The knowl-

edge of the Vedas gives men a knowledge of the gods, of the principles and powers of the cosmos; the fruits of this knowledge are enjoyment and lordship on earth, in heaven, and in the world between.

He who knows it etc.—Because nothing else remains to be known beyond the Tree of the World and its root, Brahman.

The fourteenth chapter ended with the note that to worship the Lord with undeviating love leads to liberation. But such love is not possible without detachment from the world. So the Lord begins the present discourse with a description of the World Tree in order to create in the aspirant an intense dispassion leading to love and knowledge of the Supreme Lord.

Now follows another figurative description of the different parts of the World Tree:

2

Above and below spread its branches, nourished by the gunas. Sense-objects are its buds; and its clustering roots spread downward in the world of men, giving rise to action.

Above—Up to the world of Brahmā, the highest heaven.

Below—To the human and subhuman planes.

Gunas—The three gunas form the material basis of the branches.

Sense-objects are its buds—Sound, form, and the other objects are the buddings of its foliage.

Roots—These are the secondary roots; the tap-root has been mentioned in the preceding verse. These roots are the latent impressions, attachment, aversion, and so on, which are both the cause and the effect of good and evil deeds. They bind one fast to actions, both good and evil, and perpetuate the Tree of the World. After exhausting the effects of meritorius action in the higher or lower worlds—as

gods or as animals—the souls return to the world of men for new actions, to be determined by their past works.

In the world of men—These secondary roots extend particularly in the world of men. On this earth alone can souls perform action that bears fresh results, whereas as gods or animals they reap the fruit of what they did as human beings. Since the relative world is sustained by men's actions, the roots of the Cosmic Tree are said to spread especially in the world of men.

3-4

Its true form is not comprehended here, nor its end, nor its origin, nor even its existence. Having cut down this firm-rooted Aśvattha with the strong axe of detachment, one should pray, "I take refuge in that Primal Being from whom has streamed forth this eternal activity," and seek that Goal from which they who have reached it never return.

True form—As described above. The relative world is very much like a dream or a mirage or a magic city produced by the juggler's art. It appears and disappears constantly.

End—In the absence of right knowledge the relative universe has no end, inasmuch as ignorance, latent desires, and works, by their action and reaction, keep it perpetually going. The only way to put an end to it is to resort to renunciation through the practice of detachment.

Existence—The nature of the universe as we perceive it.

Strong—Strengthened by a resolute bent of mind toward the Supreme Self, and sharpened again and again on the whetstone of true discrimination.

Detachment—From children, wealth, and the heavenly world. It is nivritti, the cessation of the original urge to action, that leads to liberation, the consummation of birth in the relative world.

From whom has streamed forth—Brahman, or the Absolute, is the ultimate source from which has been projected the illusory Tree of the Universe, just as an illusory object is created by a magician.

Eternal activity—The never ceasing current of evolution, that is to say, the phenomenal world.

Disciplines for the attainment of the Goal:

5

Free from pride and delusion, having conquered the evil of attachment, ever devoted to the Supreme Self, with desires completely stilled, liberated from the pairs of opposites known as pleasure and pain, the undeluded reach that Immutable Goal.

These are the characteristics of a true sannyāsi.

That Goal is designated:

6

It the sun illumines not, nor the moon, nor fire. It is My Supreme Abode, and they who reach it never return.

Never return—For embodiment in the relative universe. Those who have not realized the Lord are born again and again under the compulsion of the law of karma. The enlightened soul is under no compulsion to return to mortal life.

It appears that at the time of cosmic dissolution or of deep sleep the soul forgets its individuality and its phenomenal nature and becomes one with Existence. Who, then, is the jiva, or individualized soul? This is explained in the following five verses:

7

An eternal portion of Myself, having become a living soul in a world of living beings, draws to itself

the five senses, with the mind for the sixth, which abide in Prakriti.

Myself—The Supreme Lord.

Having become—Through māyā, or ignorance.

A living soul—The phenomenal being, or jiva.

Draws to itself—While returning from deep sleep or from the state of cosmic dissolution to the plane of name and form.

The jiva, or individualized soul, is that aspect of the Supreme Lord which manifests itself in everyone as the doer and the enjoyer, being limited by upādhis, or conditions, set up by avidyā, or ignorance. But in reality both the jiva and the Supreme Lord are the same. The individualized soul is like the sun reflected in water; the reflected sun is only a portion of the real sun. On the removal of the water, the reflected sun returns to the original sun and remains one with it. The sun is the Supreme Lord, and the water is the mind, created by nescience. Or the individualized soul is like the ākāśa (space or ether) in a jar, which is a portion of the infinite ākāśa; the ākāśa limited by the jar becomes one with the infinite ākāśa on the destruction of the jar, which was the cause of limitation. Afterwards it cannot again be separated from the infinite ākāśa. This explains the statement "from which they who have reached it never return."

According to this description of the jiva, each soul is in reality divine, however partial the actual manifestation of Divinity may be in its physical environment. It is much greater than its present appearance, and its goal is to transcend material limitations. In reality, the Infinite cannot have any parts. The appearance of the individualized living soul is due to avidyā.

At the time of cosmic dissolution or of deep sleep, the individualized soul, no doubt, remains merged in Prakriti, or the Nature of the Lord; but this Prakriti is tainted by ignorance, or māyā; it is not the pure essence of the Lord. Therefore the soul returns from Prakriti to the world of

the manifold at the time of a new evolution or of waking. And at that time it brings with it the mind and the senses, which also have merged in Prakriti, for the enjoyment of the world. But the soul that merges in Brahman after the attainment of Self-knowledge does not come back to mortal life.

8

When the lord acquires a body, and when he leaves it, he takes these with him and goes on his way, as the wind carries away the scents from their places.

The lord—Of the aggregate of body and senses; that is to say, the individualized soul, jiva, mentioned above.

Acquires a body—To reap the results of his past action.

These—The sense-organs and mind.

Places—The flowers.

After death the gross physical body is destroyed by cremation or burial; but the subtle body, which includes the mind and senses, accompanies the soul as the smell of flowers accompanies the wind. When the soul is reborn, it enters the new body with the senses and mind and uses them to enjoy the world and its objects.

The sense-organs are described:

9

Presiding over the ear and the eye, the organs of touch, taste, and smell, and also over the mind, he experiences sense-objects.

The transmigrating soul is only visible to men of wisdom.

10

The deluded do not perceive him when he departs from the body or dwells in it, when he experiences

objects or is united with the gunas; but they who have the eye of wisdom perceive him.

Deluded—Because their minds are attracted by the enjoyment of objects seen and unseen.

Do not perceive him—Though the self is nearest to everyone and can most easily be perceived.

United with the gunas—That is to say, when the soul experiences pleasure, pain, and delusion, through which the three gunas manifest themselves.

Eye of wisdom—The knowledge acquired from the study of the scriptures aided by reflection and reason.

No Self-knowledge is possible without yoga.

11

Those who strive, armed with yoga, behold him dwelling within themselves; but the undisciplined and the thoughtless do not perceive him, though they strive.

Yoga—Balance and poise acquired through concentration and self-control.

Undisciplined—Whose minds are not purified by austerity and self-control.

Thoughtless—Who have not abandoned their evil ways and whose pride has not been subdued.

Mere study of the scriptures, even aided by reason and reflection, will not be of much avail to those whose minds are impure and who cannot discriminate between the Real and the unreal.

The next four verses describe the immanence of the Lord as the all-illumining Light, as the all-sustaining Life, as the nourishing factor in all living organisms, and as the Self in the hearts of all:

12

The light that is in the sun and illumines the whole universe, the light that is in the moon and is likewise in fire—know that light to be Mine.

13

Entering the earth, I sustain all beings by My energy, and becoming the sapid moon, I nourish all herbs.

Entering the earth—The earth is firmly held by energy, which is a manifestation of the Lord's power.

Moon—It is the sap that gives savour to cereals. The moon ("soma" in the text) is the repository of all sap and imparts it to plants through the dew. The planting of wheat or rice seedlings in moonlight is a custom followed in many parts of the world.

14

As the fire Vaishvānara I enter into the bodies of all living creatures, and mingling with the upward and downward breaths, I digest the four kinds of food.

The fire Vaishvānara—The fire abiding in the stomach, by which food is digested.

Upward and downward breaths—Prāna and apāna.

Four kinds of food—Those that are eaten by mastication or sucking or licking or direct swallowing.

15

And I am seated in the hearts of all; from Me are memory and knowledge, and their loss as well. It is I alone who am to be known through all the Vedas; I am indeed the Author of Vedānta and the Knower of the Vedas.

Hearts of all—As the inner Onlooker, I witness all that is good and evil in their hearts.

From Me are memory etc.—It is through the inner Consciousness that one becomes conscious of the experiences of one's past births (memory) and knows of things transcending the ordinary limits of time and space (knowledge). Through evil actions this inner Consciousness is obscured and one suffers loss of memory and knowledge.

The Author of Vedānta—It is the Lord who keeps the teachings of Vedānta alive through a succession of teachers.

In the foregoing four verses have been described the glories of the Lord as manifested through superior upādhis, or conditions, such as the sun, the moon, and so on. In the following verses is stated the true nature of the Lord, pure, unlimited, and untainted by perishable or imperishable upādhis:

16

There are two beings in the world: the Perishable and the Imperishable. The Perishable comprises all creatures, and the Imperishable is said to be the Unchanging.

Two beings—Two categories, described in the text as "Purushas" because they are the upādhis, or limiting conditions, of the Purusha, or Supreme Spirit.

The Perishable—Which comprises all changing forms.

The Imperishable—The māyā-śakti, or power of the Lord, which deludes all. It is the germ of all perishable beings and manifests itself through various forms of illusion. Samsāra, from the relative standpoint, is endless; hence its seed is also imperishable. Samsāra is destroyed only by the Knowledge of Brahman. Or the word "Imperishable" may mean the conscious Enjoyer in everyone, who remains unchanged through all the experiences of man.

Quite distinct from the Perishable and the Imperishable, and untainted by the evils of either, is the Supreme Lord, eternal, pure, and free.

17

But there is another Being, the Highest, called the Supreme Self, who, as the Immutable, pervades and sustains the three worlds.

Another—Distinct from the two described in the previous verse.

Supreme Self—He is called Purushottama, or the Supreme Self, because He is higher than the body, mind, and the rest, and because He is the inmost Consciousness in all bodies.

Pervades—By His vital energy, or sentiency.

Sustains—By His mere presence as Sat, or Existence.

The Lord Himself is the Supreme Self.

18

As I surpass the Perishable and as I am higher even than the Imperishable, I am extolled in the world and in the Vedas as the Supreme Self.

The Perishable—The illusory Tree of the World, described at the beginning of the chapter.

The Imperishable—Which constitutes the seed of that Tree.

The words "Perishable" and "Imperishable" may also mean the physical body and the conscious creature. The latter is under the control of the Supreme Self.

The result of the Knowledge of the Self as described above:

19

He who, undeluded, knows Me thus as the Supreme Self—he knows all, O Bhārata, and he worships Me with all his heart.

Knows Me thus—That is to say, knows the individualized soul as one with the Supreme Self.

He knows all—Because the Supreme Self is the Self of all beings.

20

Thus, O sinless one, has this most profound teaching been imparted by Me. By knowing it a man becomes wise, O Bhārata, and fulfils all his duties.

Most profound teaching etc.—The teachings of the Gītā and the whole Vedānta have been summed up in the fifteenth chapter.

Fulfils all his duties—Whatever duty one has to do in life will have been done when Brahman is realized.

Thus in the Bhagavad Gītā, the Essence of the Upanishads, the Science of Brahman, the Scripture of Yoga, the Dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna, ends the Fifteenth Chapter, entitled:

THE WAY TO THE SUPREME SELF

Chapter Sixteen

THE DIVISION OF DIVINE AND DEMONIAC TREASURES

1-3

The Lord said: Fearlessness, purity of heart, steadfastness in knowledge and yoga; charity, self-control, and sacrifice; study of the scriptures, austerity, and uprightness;

Non-violence, truth, and freedom from anger; renunciation, tranquillity, and aversion to slander; compassion to beings and freedom from covetousness; gentleness, modesty, and absence of fickleness;

Courage, forgiveness, and fortitude; purity, and freedom from malice and overweening pride—these belong to him who is born with divine treasures.

Purity of heart—Freedom from deception, dissimulation, falsehood, and the like, in one's dealings with others.

Knowledge and yoga—Knowledge consists in understanding the nature of spiritual things, such as the Self, the Lord, and so on, as taught by the scriptures and the teacher. Yoga consists in making what has been thus learnt an object of direct experience through meditation and self-control.

Freedom from anger—Even when reviled or beaten by others.

Freedom from covetousness—Remaining unaffected even when the senses enjoy their objects.

Absence of fickleness—Abstention from speaking or moving the hands and feet when there is no necessity for it.

Fortitude—A state of mind that sustains both body and mind when they are tired or dejected.

A person endowed with these attributes enjoys happiness and peace.

The sixteenth chapter begins with a description of the spiritual treasures endowed with which one attains the wisdom hinted at in the end of the last chapter.

A description of the demoniac attributes:

4

Ostentation, arrogance, and self-conceit; anger, rudeness, and ignorance—these belong to him who is born to the heritage of the demons.

The effects of the two natures described above:

5

The divine treasures are said to be for the purpose of liberation, and the heritage of the demons, for bondage. Grieve not, O Pāndava; you are born with divine treasures.

6

There are two types of beings created in this world: the divine and the demoniac. The divine have been described at length. Hear now from Me, O Pārtha, concerning the demoniac.

The traits of demoniac persons:

7

Men of demoniac nature know not what to do and what to refrain from doing. Purity is not in them, nor good conduct, nor truth.

What to do etc.—What acts are helpful for the attainment of the goal of life and what are detrimental.

8

They say: "The world is devoid of truth, without a moral basis, and without a God. It is brought about by the union of male and female, and lust alone is its cause: what else?"

Devoid of truth—As the life and dealings of demoniac persons are based on falsehood, so also, they say, is the very nature of the world. The scriptures or the words of holy men regarding the world and the Soul are untrue.

Moral basis—According to which right alone endures and falsehood perishes.

God—Who rules the world according to the moral standard.

This is the view of the materialists.

9

Holding such a view, these lost souls of little understanding and fierce deeds rise as the enemies of the world for its destruction.

Little understanding—Since it concerns itself only with sense-objects.

10

Giving themselves up to insatiable desires, full of hypocrisy, pride, and arrogance, they hold false views through delusion and act with impure resolve.

11-12

Beset with innumerable cares, which will end only with death, looking on the gratification of desire as their highest goal, and feeling sure that this is all;

Bound by a hundred ties of hope, given up wholly to lust and wrath, they strive, by unjust means, to amass wealth for the satisfaction of their passions.

13-16

"This I have gained today, and that longing I will fulfil. This wealth is mine, and that also shall be mine in future;

"That enemy I have slain, and others, too, I will slay. I am the lord of all; I enjoy; I am prosperous, mighty, and happy;

"I am rich; I am of high birth. Who else is equal to me? I will offer sacrifice, I will give, I will rejoice." Thus, deluded by ignorance,

Bewildered by many fancies, entangled in the meshes of delusion, addicted to the gratification of lust, they fall into a loathsome hell.

Even their worship and sacrifice are for self-glorification.

17

Self-honoured, haughty, filled with the pride and the intoxication of wealth, they ostentatiously perform sacrifices, which are so only in name, in utter disregard of precepts.

Self-honoured—Not honoured by righteous people.

18

Possessed of egotism, power, and pride, and also of lust and wrath, these people, envious by nature, hate Me in the bodies of others and in their own.

Me—The Lord, who is the inmost Soul of all beings.

The fate of those who hate the Lord dwelling in living beings:

19

These cruel haters, these evil-doers, these vilest of

men, I hurl always into the wombs of the demons in the cycle of births and deaths.

Wombs of the demons—That is to say, demoniac people are born in their next life as ferocious animals, such as tigers and boars.

20

Having fallen into the wombs of the demons and being deluded from birth to birth, they never attain Me, O son of Kunti, but go farther down to the lowest state.

The idea behind the text seems to be this: The demoniac nature leads to a series of evil results inimical to all human progress. A man should therefore try to shake it off while he is yet a free agent and while he has not yet passed into a birth that would completely shut him off from the divine light.

This graphic description regarding the nature of the demoniac persons and their dire fate must not be pressed to carry more than it means. The creation of the two types in the world (XVI, 6) does not mean absolute creation but only creation at the beginning of a cycle. The creation itself is without beginning. The devas (souls with spiritual attributes) and asuras (souls with demoniac attributes), representing the forces of good and evil, are ever present in the relative world of the three gunas. Both are necessary to the evolution of the relative universe. It is not meant that human souls are so created by God from the beginning that they must be either good or evil. Nor is it meant that there is a rigid spiritual predestination, that some are rejected from the beginning by the Lord and blinded by Him so that they may be thrust down to eternal perdition. Souls are born with spiritual or demoniac attributes in accordance with the law of karma. The power of the Lord, which acts like a light, may be used for a good or an evil purpose, according to man's nature. But all souls, the asuras as well as the devas, are eternal portions of the Lord (XV, 7) and all will one day realize their spiritual heritage.

The soul, under the influence of rajas and tamas, is deprived of light, sattva, and falls a victim to the perversities of its lower nature. If it does not abandon its ways of error, it is eventually born in a subhuman body, as an asura, endowed with demoniac attributes. Turning its vision away from Light and Truth, it goes on falling, because of the force of the misdirected divine power, till it finds itself in the lowest pit of the relative world, called hell. But since it is a portion of the Divine, nay, in reality one with the Lord Himself, it cannot be consigned for eternity to this state of self-forgetfulness. One day it understands and turns to the Light. And then the other teaching of the Gītā (IX, 30) comes in—that even the greatest sinner, through his spiritual fervour, may follow the path of sattva and ultimately attain perfection and freedom.

The three great demoniac attributes that are the cause of all evils:

21

Three are the gateways of this hell leading to the ruin of the self—lust, wrath, and greed. Therefore let man renounce these three.

Ruin of the self—They make the self unfit for any noble endeavour.

The great result that follows from their renunciation:

22

The man who has escaped these three gates of darkness, O son of Kunti, practises what is good for himself and thus attains the Supreme Goal.

Gates of darkness—Leading to hell, which is full of pain and delusion.

The scriptures are the authority as to what is to be given up and what is to be followed.

23

He who discards the injunctions of the scriptures and acts upon the impulse of desire attains neither perfection nor happiness nor the Supreme Goal.

Scriptures—Here the word signifies the Vedas, which teach us the nature of God, the soul, the hereafter, and the relationship of man to man—all based on the intuitive experiences of the seers. Morality and ethics, taught from the standpoint of expediency or formulated by unaided reason, break down under the stress of circumstances. They must be based on such spiritual experiences as the realization of the divinity of the soul, the oneness of existence, and the Fatherhood of God, and then be formulated through reason.

24

Therefore let the scriptures be your authority in determining what ought to be done and what ought not to be done. Having learnt the injunctions of the scriptures, you should do your work in the world.

Do your work—That is to say, one should perform one's duty following the precepts of karmayoga.

The duties laid down in the scriptures purify a man's heart and enable him to acquire right knowledge and attain liberation.

Thus in the Bhagavad Gītā, the Essence of the Upanishads, the Science of Brahman, the Scripture of Yoga, the Dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna. ends the Sixteenth Chapter, entitled:

THE DIVISION OF DIVINE AND DEMONIAC TREASURES

Chapter Seventeen

THE THREEFOLD DIVISION OF FAITH

1

Arjuna said: When men sacrifice to the gods with faith but discard the injunctions of the scriptures, what is the nature of their devotion, O Krishna? Is it sattva, rajas, or tamas?

Scriptures—These contain the wisdom won by the collective experience of a race: its culture, religion, science, and progressive discovery of the best rule of life. Opposed to the injunctions of the scriptures is the impulse of personal desire, which, according to the character of the individual, may give rise to beneficial or harmful results. See note on XVI, 23.

Discard the injunctions etc.—The text refers to those who abandon the scriptural injunctions out of laziness, or because of the difficulty inherent in strictly complying with them, and worship the gods with faith created by their observance of the conduct of the leaders of society.

Devotion—The untranslatable Sanskrit word "nishthā" means the unswerving devotion that gives a man faith in an ideal and impels him to realize it in action.

Is it sattva etc.—Is the worship offered by them based on sattva, rajas, or tamas?

At the end of the preceding chapter Sri Krishna said that he who discards the scriptural injunctions and acts according to the promptings of his desires cannot attain the highest Knowledge. Arjuna asks about the fate of those who worship with faith but who do not know the scriptures or are indifferent to their rules.

2

The Lord said: The faith of men, born of their individual natures, is of three kinds. It is characterized by sattva, rajas, or tamas. Hear now concerning it.

Born of their individual natures—The nature of man consists of latent tendencies created by his actions—good or bad—in his past lives. The faith of each man takes the shape, colour, and quality given to it by his nature (svabhāva), the stuff of his being, his innate substance. Man acts according to his nature; he cannot easily change it. One can transform a worldly nature into a spiritual nature only with the help of insight gained through the study of the scriptures and an indomitable determination.

Three kinds—Like all things in Prakriti, or Nature.

The threefold faith:

3

The faith of each man is in accordance with his natural disposition. A man, O Bhārata, is made of his faith; what his faith is, that verily he is.

Natural disposition—That is to say, in accordance with sattva, rajas, or tamas predominating in his nature.

What his faith is etc.—If, on account of the righteous actions of his past lives, a man is born with a nature predominating in sattva, then his faith is also characterized by sattva. The same applies to rajas and tamas.

The word "śraddhā," usually translated as "faith," is not a mechanical belief in or acceptance of the words of a holy man or book. It is an affirmative and reverent attitude toward supersensuous truths. Through faith a man is intuitively convinced of the existence of the Reality underlying the universe, and his capacity for realizing that Reality. It is not imposed from outside, but is produced by the

tendencies that are the results of his past action. The intensity of this faith accounts for the passion with which he pursues an undertaking. This faith is a man's appeal to himself, or to something potent and compelling in himself or in universal reality, for his way to fullness and perfection. So a man is made of his faith; he is that faith and that faith is he. The truth he sees is determined for him by his faith. If a man's innate tendencies are characterized by sattva, then his faith will direct him to the pursuit of knowledge and happiness. If they are characterized by rajas, then his faith will direct him to the pursuit of action, ending in pain and suffering. And if they are characterized by tamas, then his faith will lead him to ignorance and delusion.

The nature of faith is to be inferred from its characteristic effects, namely, the worship of the gods and the like.

4

Men in whom sattva prevails worship the gods; men in whom rajas prevails worship demigods and demons; and men in whom tamas prevails worship ghosts and disembodied spirits.

Gods—"Deva," the word in the text, means literally a shining being; a superhuman being endowed with a preponderance of sattva; a benign deity full of noble qualities. See note on III, 11-12.

Demigods and demons—The words in the text are "yakshas" and "rākshasas." They denote two classes of supernatural beings of fierce and cruel nature.

Disembodied spirits—According to Hindu tradition, a brāhmin who, while on earth, neglects his brāhminical duties becomes after death a disembodied spirit, or preta. The word means, in general, an evil spirit worshipped by certain persons for the fulfilment of morbid, earthly desires

Aspirants seeking peace and happiness worship benign gods, who are of the nature of sattva. Those who desire materialistic enjoyments and physical pleasures worship fierce deities, who are embodiments of rajas. And people under the influence of tamas are drawn to ghosts and evil spirits, endowed with the traits of inertia, delusion, and morbidity. Different beings, embodying sattva, rajas, or tamas, exist, and worshippers are drawn to them according to their faith and inclination. When worshipped with faith, they answer the prayers of their devotees and fulfil their respective desires. From the Vedântic point of view these deities are different manifestations of the Lord. From the Lord alone comes all fulfilment.

Rare is the man whose worship is characterized by sattva. Most men perform their worship under the impulsion of faith characterized by rajas and tamas.

5-6

Those vain and conceited men who, impelled by the force of their lust and attachment, subject themselves to severe austerities not ordained by the scriptures,

And, fools that they are, torture all their bodily organs, and Me, too, who dwell within the body—know that they are fiendish in their resolves.

Austerities—Which cause pain to themselves and other living beings.

Me—The Lord, who is the witness of man's thoughts and deeds. To disregard the Lord's injunctions is to injure the Lord Himself.

7

Even the food that is dear to all is of the three kinds. Likewise are the sacrifices, austerities, and gifts. Hear now the distinctions between them.

The division of food, sacrifice, austerity, and gift according to the three gunas is described in order that the aspirants may eat the right food, perform the right sacrifice, practise the right austerity, and make the right gift so as to secure increase in the element of sattva.

The food characterized by the three gunas according to its effect on the body and mind of the eater:

8

Food that promotes longevity, vitality, strength, health, pleasure, appetite, and that is succulent, oleaginous, substantial, and agreeable, is favoured by people endowed with sattva.

Vitality—Mental vigour.

Substantial—Whose essence nourishes the body for a long time.

Agreeable—Pleasant to look at.

People desirous of increasing sattva should eat food characterized by these qualities and avoid what is described in the two following verses.

9

Food that is excessively bitter, sour, salty, hot, acrid, dry, and burning is liked by people endowed with rajas. It causes pain, grief, and disease.

Excessively—This word should be understood with all the seven characteristics.

Pain—At the time the food is eaten.

Grief—The after-effect in the form of mental distress.

10

And food that is ill cooked, tasteless, putrid, stale, unclean, and left over, is favoured by people endowed with tamas.

The three kinds of sacrifice:

11

That sacrifice is of the nature of sattva which is offered according to the scriptural rules by those who expect no reward and who firmly believe that it is their duty to sacrifice.

Sacrifice—The word in the text is "yajna," which means literally the giving of offerings to a deity. In ancient India through this method of worship the devotees communed with the gods. It was obligatory for a householder to perform sacrifice. See note on III, 10.

It is their duty etc.—The duty of a man lies in the performance of the worship itself and not in seeking any result from it.

12

But that sacrifice which is performed in expectation of reward and for the sake of ostentation—know that to be of the nature of rajas.

Such a sacrifice may be performed outwardly according to the scriptures, but its motive is ostentation, pride, or a strong lust for its fruit.

13

And that sacrifice which is not performed according to the scriptural rules, and in which no food is distributed, no hymns are chanted, and no fees paid, and which is devoid of faith, is said to be of the nature of tamas.

No food is distributed—The giving of food to the brāhmins (the custodians of the Hindu spiritual culture) and the poor is an indispensable part of the sacrifice, without which it becomes wholly a self-regarding thing.

No hymns are chanted—That is to say, they are uttered with defective accents, which make them useless to all intents and purposes.

No fees paid—To the priests who officiate at the sacrifice.

The sacrifice characterized by tamas is performed mechanically, either because the act of living demands it, or because it comes in our way, or because others do it, or because of the desire to avoid another greater difficulty that may arise from its non-performance, or for some other unworthy motive.

The three kinds of austerity:

14

Worship of the gods, of the twice-born, of teachers, and of the wise; cleanliness, uprightness, continence, and non-violence—these are said to be the austerity of the body.

Worship of the gods etc.—The objects of this worship are the creators and protectors of India's spiritual culture.

Twice-born—See note on I, 7.

Austerity—"Tapas," the word in the text, refers to self-discipline, prescribed by religion in order to bring body and mind under control.

15

Words that do not give offence and that are truthful, pleasant, and beneficial, and also the regular recitation of the Vedas—these are said to be the austerity of speech.

The discipline of speech consists in the combination of all the four characteristics mentioned in the text; the purpose will be frustrated if it lacks any of them.

16

Serenity of mind, gentleness, silence, self-control, and purity of heart—these constitute the austerity of the mind.

Silence—The control of thought, which precedes the silence of the tongue.

Purity of heart—See note on XVI, 1-3.

The austerities described above classified according to the three gunas:

17

This threefold austerity practised with supreme faith by steadfast men, without the desire for fruit, is said to be of the nature of sattva.

18

The austerity that is practised in order to gain respect, honour, and reverence, and for ostentation, is said to be of the nature of rajas. Its result is uncertain and transitory.

19

The austerity that is practised with a determination based on foolishness, by means of self-torture, or for the purpose of ruining another is declared to be of the nature of tamas.

The gifts characterized by the three gunas:

20

That gift which is made to one who can make no return, and with the feeling that it is one's duty to give, and which is given at the right place and time and to a worthy person—such a gift is held to be of the nature of sattva.

Who can make no return—Who cannot do, or who though able is not expected to do, anything in return.

Right place and time—According to the traditional view, a gift becomes very effective when it is made in a holy place and on an auspicious occasion.

21

But that which is given for the sake of recompense or with the expectation of fruit or in a grudging mood is accounted as of the nature of rajas.

Recompense—Expecting a return from the receiver.
Fruit—In heaven or in the next life.

22

And the gift that is made without respect or with disdain, at an improper place and time, and to an unworthy person is declared to be of the nature of tamas.

It may appear that all acts of sacrifice, austerity, and giving will be characterized either by rajas or tamas and that no one will be able to practise or perform them in the manner of sattva. Sri Krishna suggests the way of purifying an imperfect action:

23

"Om Tat Sat"—this has been declared as the threefold designation of Brahman. By means of it were created, at the beginning, the Brāhmins, the Vedas, and the Sacrifices.

Om—The principal symbol of Brahman both as the Personal God and as the Impersonal Truth. Each letter—A, U, M—indicates one of Its three manifestations—gross, subtle, or causal—in ascending order, and the syllable as a whole indicates the transcendental state, Turiya, which is identical with the Absolute. Om also means "yes" or affirmation. See note on VII, 8.

Tat—Meaning "That," the Indefinable, which can only be indirectly described as "That."

Sat—Meaning Reality, the supreme and unchanging Existence.

Declared—In Vedānta, by the knowers of Brahman.

Were created—By Brahmā, or Prajāpati.

When a sacrificial rite or the like is found defective, it will be made faultless by the utterance of one of these three symbols of Brahman.

24

Therefore the acts of sacrifice, gift, and austerity, enjoined by the scriptures, are always begun by the followers of the Vedas with the utterance of "Om."

25

And with the utterance of "Tat," and without seeking any recompense, are the various acts of sacrifice, austerity, and gift performed by those who seek liberation.

The utterance of "Tat" at the beginning of a sacrifice, austerity, or gift purifies the heart and eliminates the desire for fruit.

26

The word "Sat" is used to denote reality and goodness; and likewise, O Pārtha, the word "Sat" is used for an auspicious action.

Auspicious action—Such as a marriage-ceremony or the birth of a son.

In expressing the reality of an object that is not absolutely real—such as the birth of a son—and also the goodness of a thing that is not absolutely good or auspicious, the word "Sat," an epithet of Brahman, which alone is absolutely real, good, and auspicious, is used.

27

Steadfastness in sacrifice, austerity, and gift is also called "Sat"; and so too is any action connected therewith.

Therewith—That is to say, connected with sacrifice, austerity, and gift, or with Brahman, whose triple epithet is "Om Tat Sat."

Imperfectly performed acts of sacrifice, austerity, and gift are made perfect by the utterance, with faith, of "Sat," the name of Brahman.

But without faith everything is futile.

28

Whatever sacrifice or gift is made, whatever austerity is practised, whatever ceremony is observed —it is all called "asat," "non-existent," if it is done without faith. It is of no account here or hereafter.

Non-existent—That is to say, it is as good as not performed, because it does not bring any result.

Here or hereafter—Though costing much trouble, it is of no use here as it is not approved by the wise, nor can it produce any good effect hereafter.

The teaching of this chapter may be thus summed up: There are devotees who are ignorant of the scriptural injunctions and yet endowed with śraddhā, or faith. Their faith, according to its nature, may be characterized as belonging to sattva, rajas, or tamas. These devotees should cultivate pure sattva by avoiding food, worship, gift, and austerity that are of the nature of rajas and tamas. They should be devoted to sattva alone. When their gift, worship, or austerity is found to be defective, it should be purified by uttering "Om," "Tat," and "Sat." This will purify the

minds of the devotees and gradually enable them to realize Brahman.

Thus in the Bhagavad Gītā, the Essence of the Upanishads, the Science of Brahman, the Scripture of Yoga, the Dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna, ends the Seventeenth Chapter, entitled:

THE THREEFOLD DIVISION OF FAITH

Chapter Eighteen

THE WAY TO LIBERATION THROUGH RENUNCIATION

1

Arjuna said: I desire to know the true nature of sannyāsa and tyāga, as distinguished from each other, O mighty Hrishikeśa, O Slayer of Keśi.

Sannyāsa and tyāga—Both words are generally used to mean renunciation. They have been thus used in the preceding chapters without distinction.

This chapter gives a summary of the whole Gītā and the Vedic religion and philosophy.

2

The Lord said: The renunciation of works induced by desire is understood by the sages to be sannyāsa, while the surrender of the fruits of all works is called tyāga by the wise.

All works—There are four kinds of action. See note on V, 13.

The two words convey the same general idea of renunciation, with a slight distinction.

3

Some philosophers declare that all works should be relinquished as evil; others say that works of sacrifice, gift, and austerity should not be given up.

As evil—Because it is impossible to do a work without inflicting misery or injury on someone.

The word "karma," meaning action, is generally used in the Gītā in the sense of religious rites and ceremonies, which bring to their performer, directly or indirectly, some result. It also includes works of public welfare, such as building a road or digging a well. In ancient India all activities, even the secular, had some religious bearing or significance.

According to the commentator Śankara, action and knowledge are incompatible. Action denotes a consciousness of diversity, such as the distinction between the agent, the instrument of action, and the result. But a man endowed with Knowledge sees only unity. Action forms the discipline of the karmayogis; they purify their hearts through the selfless work advocated in the Gītā and thus become ready for the Knowledge of Reality. Renunciation, discussed in this and some of the following verses, applies to the karmayogis, who are still unenlightened about the Ultimate Reality and whose spiritual discipline lies through the performance of duties; it does not apply to the sannyāsis, who follow the path of knowledge. (III, 3) The sannyāsis renounce religious rites and ceremonies, philanthropic duties, and other secular activities because these are associated with the idea of a doer, an instrument, and a result. They devote themselves to philosophical discrimination between the Real and the unreal, and to contemplation of the Real. What little action they perform, such as procuring food or studying, is done by them without any attachment, since they know that action pertains to the gunas. (V, 8-9, 13) The life of the sannyāsis has been described by the Lord as free from all undertakings. Therefore the present verse and also verse 8 of this chapter apply to persons who are ignorant of the true nature of the Self. They are asked to perform selfless duties for the purification of their minds. The injunction about work also applies to those who, through delusion or fear of trouble, may sometimes feel tempted to give up action. Different kinds of renunciation (XVIII, 7-9) and divergent views about it (XVIII, 2, 4-6) are described in connexion with the karmayogis, and not with reference to the sannyāsis.

The incompatibility of the highest Knowledge and the performance of duties is discussed by the translator in the concluding paragraphs of the Introduction of this book.

The different kinds of renunciation apply to the karmayogis.

4

Learn from Me, O best of the Bhāratas, the truth about relinquishment; for relinquishment is declared to be of three kinds, O tiger among men.

Truth about relinquishment—As asked by Arjuna in XVIII, 1.

The three kinds of relinquishment apply only to the karmayogis, who are ignorant about the Self. The subject is profound and can be taught only by the Lord Himself.

The truth about relinquishment as suggested in the foregoing text:

5

Acts of sacrifice, gift, and austerity must not be given up, but should be performed. For verily, sacrifice, gift, and austerity purify the wise.

Wise—Who perform actions without desiring any fruit.

6

Even these works, however, should be done without attachment and desire for fruit. This, O Pārtha, is My conclusive and final judgement.

The proposition stated in XVIII, 4, is now concluded. The word "even" in the text implies that the works of sacrifice, gift, and austerity should be performed by a seeker after liberation, though they cause bondage in the case of one who is attached to his work and desires its fruit.

The three kinds of renunciation:

7

The renunciation of obligatory action is not proper. Its abandonment, from delusion, is declared to be of the nature of tamas.

Obligatory action—Such as daily worship and devotions, which every aspirant must perform. It also includes, for the householder, such duties as feeding animals and showing hospitality to guests. Through the performance of these duties the aspirant's heart becomes pure.

8

The renunciation of a man who abandons a duty from fear of physical suffering, because it is painful, is of the nature of rajas; it does not bring him the fruit of renunciation.

The fruit of renunciation—That is to say, liberation. It is denied to him because his renunciation is not accompanied by wisdom.

9

When a man performs an obligatory action only because it ought to be done, and renounces all attachment and the fruit—his renunciation, O Arjuna, is characterized by sattva.

The characteristics of a devotee whose renunciation is of the nature of sattva:

10

The wise man of renunciation, who is endowed with sattva and whose doubts are dispelled, never hates a duty that is disagreeable nor feels attachment to a duty that is agreeable.

An aspirant performs his duties in the manner described above and gradually removes the impurities of his heart, as a result of which he comes to know that the Self is birthless, deathless, and immutable. Gradually he renounces all actions in thought and becomes devoted to Self-knowledge. Thus attaining freedom from action, he fulfils the purpose of karmayoga.

An unenlightened man identifies himself with the body and thinks the Self to be the active agent. Such a person should perform the prescribed duties but renounce their fruit.

11

It is indeed impossible for an embodied being to renounce action entirely. But he who renounces the fruit of action is regarded as one who has renounced.

Embodied being—One who identifies himself with the body.

Is regarded as one etc.—This is only meant as a glorification of the renunciation of the fruit of action.

The renunciation of all action is possible only for him who does not identify himself with the body and who knows his Self to be one with the actionless Brahman.

What purpose is served by the renunciation of all action?

12

The threefold fruit of action—desirable, undesirable, and mixed—accrues after death to those who have not renounced, but none whatever to the sannyāsis.

Action—Characterized by dharma and adharma.

Desirable—Enjoyed in a heavenly body.

Undesirable—Experienced in a subhuman body.

Mixed—Experienced in a human body.

Who have not renounced—Who perform action owing to their ignorance of the Supreme Reality.

Sannyāsis—Those who have renounced the world and its duties and who devote themselves only to Self-knowledge.

The ignorant person identifies himself with the body and considers action, agency, and the accessories to be real; therefore for him the abandonment of action is not possible. But the idea that action, agency, and the accessories are real is due to ignorance of the Supreme Reality.

13-14

Learn from Me, O mighty Arjuna, the five causes that bring about the accomplishment of a work, as declared in the philosophy of knowledge, which puts an end to all action:

The body, the doer, the different senses, the many and various functions of the vital breaths, and the presiding deity as the fifth.

Philosophy of knowledge—The word "sāmkhya" in the text refers to Vedānta, in which is expounded everything that should be known about the Reality.

Which puts an end etc.—All action ceases when the Knowledge of the Self is attained through the study of Vedānta. Compare: II, 46; IV, 33, 37.

Body—Through which are manifested desire, hatred, happiness, misery, and so on.

Functions of the vital breaths—Prāna (out-breathing), apāna (in-breathing), and the rest.

Presiding deity—An unseen power other than the human factors. Each of the sense-organs is controlled by a reflection of Consciousness called its presiding deity. Thus āditya (the sun) is the presiding deity of the eye, by whose aid it sees and acts; and so on with the other senses.

15

Whatever action a man performs with his body, speech, or mind, whether right or wrong—these five are its causes.

16

That being so, the man of perverted mind, who, on account of impure understanding, looks on the Self, the Absolute, as the agent—he sees not at all.

17

He who is free from the feeling of I-consciousness and whose understanding is undefiled—though he slays these men, he slays not nor is he bound.

Free from the feeling etc.—He knows the five factors mentioned in the fourteenth verse to be the causes of all action, and the Self to be the actionless Witness. This is due to his knowledge of scripture, his training by a competent teacher, and his possession of the sound principles of reasoning.

Whose understanding is undefiled—He does not identify the Self with a good or bad action done by the body or senses at the bidding of the gunas.

Though he slays—From the standpoint of the ignorant.

He slays not—From the standpoint of Truth.

Nor is he bound—By the results of slaying.

Body and Soul, matter and Spirit, are completely different from each other. The attributes of the one cannot affect the other, just as the water of a mirage cannot moisten a single grain of sand in the desert. Whatever change may take place in the body cannot affect the Spirit.

The teachings of the Gītā may be said to conclude here. At the beginning Sri Krishna stated the proposition: "The Self slays not nor is slain" (II, 19) and gave the immutability of the Self as the reason (II, 20). He also briefly introduced the idea (II, 21) that an enlightened person is

not compelled to engage in action and explained it in detail throughout the treatise. Now He concludes the book in the words that the wise man "slays not nor is he bound." The essence of the teachings is this: A sannyāsi is free from I-consciousness and identification with the body; he renounces all action because it is brought about by ignorance of the true nature of the Self. Therefore the threefold fruit of action—good, evil, and mixed—does not affect him. It is only an unenlightened man that is affected by it.

The immutable Self is not in any way connected with action. The incitement to action is described:

18

Knowledge, the object of knowledge, and the knower form the threefold incitement to action; and the instrument, the object, and the doer are the threefold basis of action.

Knowledge etc.—The performance of an action, either to obtain or to avoid a thing, is possible only when there is a conjunction of these three.

Instrument—It is of two kinds: external, such as the different organs of perception, and internal, such as the mind and understanding.

Object—That which is sought for and reached through action by the doer.

Doer—He who sets the organs going.

All actions inhere in these three: the instrument, the object, and the doer; hence they form the bases of action.

19

Knowledge, action, and the doer are declared in the science of the gunas to be of three kinds, according to the distinction of the gunas. Hear of them as they are.

Science of the gunas—Meaning Sāmkhya philosophy, propounded by Kapila. He is acknowledged by all, including the Vedāntists, as the authority on the science of the gunas.

Since knowledge, action, and the doer are characterized by the three gunas, they fall into the category of Prakriti—Nature, or matter. They have no connexion with the Ātman, or Self.

The threefold character of knowledge:

20

The knowledge by which one indestructible Substance is seen in all beings, undivided in the divided—know that that knowledge is of the nature of sattva.

Indestructible Substance—That is to say, Brahman, or the Supreme Reality. It does not change though the outer form undergoes modifications.

All beings—From the highest deity to a blade of grass.

Undivided—Permeating in the same manner.

With the help of the knowledge characterized by sattva one sees the non-dual Atman as forming the inner substance of everything, though there are differences in the degree of Its manifestation.

The knowledge characterized by rajas:

21

But that knowledge through which one sees in all beings various entities of different kinds as differing from one another—know that that knowledge is of the nature of rajas.

Entities—Souls.

Of different kinds—Endowed with different characteristics, such as happiness, unhappiness, and the like.

As differing from one another—Different in different bodies.

Finding creatures happy or unhappy, wise or ignorant, ugly or beautiful, a man endowed with the knowledge characterized by rajas thinks that different souls dwell in different bodies.

The knowledge characterized by tamas:

22

And the knowledge that is confined to one single effect as if it were the whole, and is without reason, without foundation in truth, and trivial—that knowledge is declared to be of the nature of tamas.

One single effect—Such as the body, which is taken to be the all-pervading Self, or an image, which is regarded as the omnipresent Lord.

Trivial—Because it deals with a trivial object or because it produces an insignificant result.

The Ātman is the all-pervading Spirit. A man endowed with the knowledge characterized by tamas finds the Ātman confined to one body only. Similarly, he thinks of the Lord as confined to a single image or symbol.

The threefold nature of action:

23

The action that is obligatory and is done without love or hate by one who desires no fruit and who is free from attachment—that action is characterized by sattva.

of three fourths of the false and distorted understanding of mankind. Rajas is the great sinner and the positive misleader.

32

The understanding that, being enveloped in darkness, regards adharma as dharma and reverses all values—that, O Pārtha, is of the nature of tamas.

The buddhi, or understanding, under the influence of tamas calls light darkness and darkness light, takes what is not dharma and upholds it as dharma, persists in the thing that ought not to be done and holds it up to us as the one right thing to do.

33

The firmness that is accompanied by unswerving concentration, and by which one controls the activities of the mind, the prānas, and the senses—that, O Pārtha, is of the nature of sattva.

Unswerving concentration—Concentration through yoga on the ideal of Brahman.

Controls the activities of the mind etc.—That is to say, restrains them from rushing into what is opposed to dharma.

One can effectively restrain the activities of the mind, the prānas, and the senses only by that firmness which is acquired through concentration on Brahman. An ordinary firmness, not so acquired, gives way under the stress of circumstances.

34

But the firmness by which one holds fast to dharma, pleasure, and wealth, desiring the fruit of each through an intense attachment—that, O Pārtha, is of the nature of rajas.

Dharma—The aim of observing dharma is the enjoyment of happiness both here and hereafter.

35

And the firmness by which a stupid person does not give up his sleep, fear, grief, despondency, and sensuality—that, O Pārtha, is of the nature of tamas.

Does not give up etc.—That is to say, is inordinately addicted to sleep and the rest, regarding these to be the only worth-while objects to be pursued.

After stating the threefold division of action and also of the several factors connected therewith, Sri Krishna describes the threefold division of happiness, which is the goal of action:

36-37

And now hear from Me, O Bhārata prince, the three kinds of happiness:

That in which a man comes to rejoice by practice and in which he reaches the end of pain, and that which is like poison at first but like nectar in the end—that happiness, born of the clear knowledge of the Self, is said to be of the nature of sattva.

By practice—The happiness characterized by sattva does not, like sensuous enjoyment, produce an immediate result.

Like poison at first—Because it has to be attained through the knowledge of Truth, renunciation of worldly objects, meditation, and concentration. All these require arduous endeavour at the beginning.

Born of the clear knowledge of the Self—Because Self-knowledge removes from the mind the impurity of rajas and tamas and endows it with clarity and serenity.

The source of this happiness is not in external things, but within every man. The yogis enjoy it through their communion with the inmost Self.

38

That which arises from the contact of the senses with their objects, and which is like nectar at first but like poison in the end—that happiness is said to be of the nature of rajas.

Like nectar at first—This is one of the characteristics of all sensuous happiness.

Like poison in the end—Because it leads to loss of strength, vigour, complexion, wisdom, intelligence, wealth, and energy.

39

But that which deludes the soul at the beginning and even after its termination, and which springs from sleep, sloth, and error—that happiness is declared to be of the nature of tamas.

The topic is concluded:

40

There is no creature here on earth, nor among the gods in heaven, who is free from the three gunas born of Prakriti.

The whole relative universe, with its various material entities, and actions, instruments of action, and results, is characterized by the gunas and set up by avidyā, or ignorance. Hence it may seem that the cessation of relative existence is not possible and liberation cannot be attained. Sri Krishna says to Arjuna that man should worship the Lord through the performance of the duties for which he is qualified. Thus he will obtain divine grace, and through it, liberation.

41

The duties of brāhmins, kshatriyas, vaiśyas, and

śudras have been assigned according to the gunas born of Nature.

Assigned—Allotted to each class. The scriptures allot different duties to the different castes, taking into consideration the preponderance of the gunas in their respective natures.

Gunas born of Nature—The word "Nature" (svabhāva) may mean māyā, the power of the Lord, consisting of the three gunas. According to the gunas of Nature, the different castes are endowed with different attributes. A brāhmin's nature consists mostly of sattva; a kshatriya's of rajas and sattva, the latter being under the influence of the former; a vaiśya's of rajas and tamas, tamas being under the influence of rajas; and a sudra's of tamas and rajas, rajas being under the influence of tamas.

Or the text may be explained in a different way: The manifestation of the gunas cannot be without a cause. The cause is the nature (svabhāva) of the man himself, formed by the tendencies (samskāras) acquired as a result of his desires, actions, and associations in his past lives.

The Gītā lays the utmost emphasis on svadharma—the dharma, or duty, of an individual—as determined by his svabhāva, his inner nature formed as a result of his own past actions. When a man's outer action is determined by his svabhāva, it is the right and healthful thing, the authentic movement of his soul. Arjuna is asked by Sri Krishna to fight because it is his svadharma, the very stuff of his kshatriya nature. One's own dharma, however defective, is better for oneself than the well performed dharma of another. It is desirable to risk one's life in the performance of one's dharma; for to follow another's dharma is dangerous to the soul and contrary to the natural way of evolution; it is a thing imposed from outside and therefore a hindrance to one's achievement of the true stature of one's spirit. Work undertaken at the bidding of one's dharma should be laid as an offering at the feet of the Lord; the fruit of the work belongs to the Lord Himself. The ideal of svadharma determined

by one's svabhāva and not imposed from outside is the philosophical basis of the Hindu caste-system, which is mainly responsible for the cohesion and integrity of Hindu society during the past several thousand years.

42

Control of the mind, control of the senses, austerity, cleanliness, forbearance, and uprightness, as also knowledge, realization, and faith—these are the duties of a brāhmin, born of his own nature.

Austerity—Described in XVII, 14-16.

Realization—Of the nature of God, the soul, and so on, described in the scriptures.

Faith—In the hereafter as described in the scriptures.

43

Heroism, high spirit, firmness, resourcefulness, dauntlessness in battle, generosity, and sovereignty—these are the duties of a kshatriya, born of his own nature.

Resourcefulness—The performance, without confusion, of duties that present themselves quite unexpectedly and demand ready action.

Sovereignty—The temperament of a ruler and leader.

44

Agriculture, cattle-rearing, and trade are the duties of a vaiśya, born of his own nature. And the duty of a śudra, born of his own nature, is action consisting of service.

Consisting of service—Rendered to members of the other castes.

These duties rightly performed bring happiness hereafter and make their performers fit for higher knowledge.

45

Man attains high perfection by devotion to his own duty. Hear from Me, O Arjuna, how perfection is attained by him who is devoted to his own duty.

High perfection—Which consists in the fitness of the body and senses for devotion to knowledge.

But the mere performance of a duty does not bring perfection.

46

By worshipping Him from whom all beings proceed and by whom the whole universe is pervaded—by worshipping Him through the performance of duty does a man attain perfection.

Him—The Supreme Lord, who is the Inner Guide of each soul and who pervades the universe as Spirit and Energy.

The veil of māyā, creating the notion of duties, actions, and so on, separates man from the Lord. The working-out of one's own karma, according to the law of one's being, is the means by which the veil of māyā can be rent and the Lord realized. Duty performed as an act of worship to the Lord, without desire for the result, accomplishes this end, through His grace.

47

Better is one's own dharma, though imperfect, than the dharma of another well performed. He who does the duty ordained by his own nature incurs no sin.

As a poisonous substance does not injure the worm born in that substance, so he who does even an unpleasant duty ordained by his own dharma incurs no evil. That is the only real thing for him. All other duties are alien to his nature. Throughout all of Sri Krishna's exhortation to Arjuna about duty it should not be forgotten that duty must be performed

How is this consummation attained?

51-53

Endowed with a pure understanding, restraining the self with firmness, turning away from sound and other objects, and abandoning love and hatred;

Dwelling in solitude, eating but little, controlling the speech, body, and mind, ever engaged in meditation and concentration, and cultivating freedom from passion;

Forsaking conceit and power, pride and lust, wrath and possessions, tranquil in heart, and free from ego—he becomes worthy of becoming one with Brahman.

Pure understanding—An understanding (buddhi) that is free from doubt and delusion, and unswerving in its devotion to the goal. The pure buddhi, because it reflects Consciousness undistortedly, is the same as Brahman.

The self—The body and the senses.

Turning away from sound etc.—Relinquishing all luxuries, all objects except the minimum that is necessary for the bare sustenance of the body.

Abandoning love and hatred—Giving up love and hatred even for objects that are necessary for the bare sustenance of the body.

Dwelling in solitude etc.—Solitude and the control of food are conducive to serenity of mind, because they eliminate distraction, drowsiness, and other evils.

Ever engaged—The word "ever" implies that the aspirant for Self-knowledge gives up all other rituals and ceremonies and practises only meditation and concentration.

Meditation—Upon the true nature of the Self.

Concentration—One-pointedness of the mind on the Self.

Freedom from passion—For objects here and hereafter.

Power—That power which is combined with lust and passion.

Forsaking . . . possessions—This is the characteristic of a paramahamsa sannyāsi, a monk of the highest order, who

does not keep with him the slightest possessions, even for the bare sustenance of his body.

Worthy of becoming etc.—An aspirant endowed with the virtues stated in the text attains the supreme perfection of total identity with Brahman.

The result of undeviating union with Brahman:

54

Having become Brahman and being tranquil in heart, he neither grieves nor desires. He treats alike all beings and attains supreme devotion to Me.

Having become Brahman—Firmly grounded in the conviction that he is Brahman.

He neither grieves nor desires—Because of his absence of identification with the body, senses, and mind.

Treats alike—He regards the pleasure and pain of others as if they were his own.

Supreme devotion—Mentioned in VII, 17.

55

By that devotion he knows Me, knows what, in truth, I am and who I am. Then, having known Me in truth, he forthwith enters into Me.

What, in truth, I am—He knows that the Lord alone is the essence of the diverse manifestations caused by His māyā.

Who I am—He knows that the Lord is devoid of all names and forms caused by māyā and is of the nature of the Absolute.

Having known Me in truth—Having known that the Lord is non-dual, unborn, undecaying, unchanging, and of the nature of Spirit and Consciousness.

Enters into Me—The acts of knowing and entering are not two separate and consecutive actions; they are one and the same. To know the Lord truly is to be completely absorbed in Him.

Supreme devotion (XVIII, 54), which is the consummation of knowledge, is attained by the aspirant when his knowledge of the unity of the individual self and the transcendental Self—realized through the instructions of the scriptures and the teacher and also through his practice of such disciplines as purity, humility, non-violence, and so on—is accompanied by the renunciation of all activity associated with the notion of a doer and a result, and also when such knowledge is corroborated by his own experience. Through such devotion he creates an uninterrupted mental current by which he remains ever aware of his identity with the Supreme Self. It is obvious that work that assumes a distinction between the doer, the instrument, and the result must be renounced by a man who wants to maintain such a current.

The liberation described above may also be attained through the performance of one's duties.

56

Even though engaged in all kinds of action, a man who has taken refuge in Me reaches, by My grace, the eternal and imperishable Abode.

All kinds of action—Including even forbidden action.

Taken refuge in Me—Performing his duty to please the Lord alone and not to earn any result for himself.

57

Surrendering, in thought, all actions to Me, regarding Me as the Supreme Goal, and practising steadiness of mind, fix your heart, O Arjuna, constantly on Me.

Surrendering etc.—As stated in IV, 24 and IX, 27.

58

Fixing your heart on Me, you will overcome every difficulty by My grace; but if from self-conceit you do not listen to Me, you shall perish utterly.

59

If, indulging in self-conceit, you say to yourself, "I will not fight," vain is your resolution. Your nature will compel you.

Nature—The kshatriya nature, with a preponderance of rajas.

60

Bound by your own karma, O son of Kunti, which is born of your very nature, what through delusion you seek not to do, you shall do even against your will.

Karma—Such as heroism, high spirit, and so on, mentioned in XVIII, 43.

61

The Lord dwells in the hearts of all beings, O Arjuna, and by His māyā causes them to revolve as though mounted on a machine.

Arjuna—The word also means "white" and signifies a man of pure heart.

Mounted on a machine—As marionettes are moved by a wire-puller seated behind the screen, so also the created beings move and act on the stage of the world, under the control of the Lord seated in the hearts of all. Compare: IX, 10.

62

Take refuge in Him alone with all your soul, O Bhārata. By His grace will you gain Supreme Peace and the Everlasting Abode.

Take refuge in Him alone—Give up self-conceit, for all creatures are under the control of the Supreme Lord.

63

Thus has wisdom more profound than all profundi-

ties been declared to you by Me. Reflect upon it fully and act as you will.

It—The teaching of the Gītā.

Act as you will—The scriptures serve the purpose of telling man what he should do and what he should not. It is up to man himself to choose the right and reject the wrong.

64

Again listen to My supreme word, the profoundest of all. You are well beloved of Me; therefore I will tell you what is for your good.

65

Fix your heart on Me, give your love to Me, worship Me, bow down before Me; so shall you come to Me. This is My pledge to you, for you are dear to Me.

The devotee who looks upon the Lord as his aim, means, and end is certain to reach the Lord. The Lord's promise cannot but be fulfilled. Since liberation is the result of whole-souled devotion to the Lord, one should look upon Him alone as the highest and sole Refuge.

66

Abandon all dharmas and come to Me alone for shelter. I will deliver you from all sins; do not grieve.

Dharmas—Dharma, righteous action, here includes what is unrighteous also. All action, righteous or unrighteous, creates bondage and therefore is incompatible with the supreme liberation taught here. Sri Krishna lays down renunciation of all action as the condition of liberation.

Me—The Lord, the Self of all, dwelling in all as their inmost essence.

For shelter—For there is none else except the Lord.

I will deliver you—By revealing the true nature of the Lord, which is beyond the multiplicity of the relative world.

All sins—That is to say, the bondage imposed on men in the form of dharma and adharma. Forgetfulness of the true

nature of the Lord, through His māyā, creates the illusion of good and evil, pain and pleasure, and the other pairs of opposites, which impel men to action for the acceptance of the one and the rejection of the other.

The conclusion of the Gītā, according to the commentator Śankara, is that supreme liberation, which also is the highest Bliss, is not possible either through work (ritualistic, philanthropic, or any kind of work associated with the idea of a doer, means of action, and result) or through a conjunction of work and knowledge; it is possible only through Self-knowledge, or the Knowledge of Brahman. Action is possible only in a relative world of multiplicity. The perception of the manifold is due to avidyā, or ignorance, on account of which man feels an urge to action. Ignorance is without beginning and so also is the urge to action. As by darkness one cannot destroy darkness, so by means of action one cannot remove ignorance and attain the highest Bliss. As light alone can destroy darkness, so the Knowledge of the Self—the Knowledge that makes one realize that the Self is unborn, immortal, incorporeal, ever pure, ever free, and untouched by time, space, and causation—destroys ignorance and with it the illusory notion of one's duty in the world of multiplicity. Indeed, Knowledge removes the illusion of the very existence of the relative universe and reveals the Reality, which is One and without a second. Further, eternal Bliss cannot be the *effect* of action or anything else; in that case it must have a beginning and cannot be eternal. This Bliss, or liberation, is said to be produced by Knowledge only in a figurative sense, inasmuch as Knowledge destroys ignorance, and this destruction is simultaneous with the revelation of the ever existent Reality.

The teachings of the Gītā are concluded. Now the Lord lays down the rules for their handing down:

67

You must not speak about it to one who is not austere in life or who is without devotion, nor to one

who does not wish to hear, nor to one who speaks ill of Me.

It—The instruction embodied in the Gītā.

Without devotion—To God or to his teacher.

Who does not wish to hear—The word in the text may also mean "who does not render service to the guru."

Who speaks ill of Me—Who regards Me, Krishna, as an ordinary man and does not recognize My divine nature.

The merit of teaching the Gītā to the Lord's devotees:

68

He who, with supreme devotion to Me, teaches this deeply profound philosophy to those who are devoted to Me shall without question come to Me.

Teaches—The teacher of the Gītā must have the faith that through his teaching he is rendering service to the Lord, the Supreme Teacher.

Devotion to the Lord is the condition for being a student or a teacher of the Gītā.

69

There is none among men who can do anything more pleasing to Me than he; nor shall there be another on earth dearer to Me than he.

He—Who explains the teachings of the Gītā to the Lord's devotees.

The result of the study of the Gītā:

70

And he who will study this sacred dialogue of ours—by him shall I have been worshipped through knowledge as a sacrifice; such is My judgement.

Knowledge as a sacrifice—Various kinds of sacrifice (yajna) have been described in the fourth chapter of the Gītā, and it has been pointed out (IV, 33) that the sacrifice through knowledge is the best of all.

The result of hearing the Gītā:

71

And the man who hears this, full of faith and free from malice—even he, liberated from sin, shall attain the happy regions of the righteous.

Even he—That a more meritorious result awaits him who understands the teachings of the Gītā need not be pointed out.

The Divine Teacher wants to know whether or not the pupil has understood the teachings of the Gītā. If not, He will find some other means to bring conviction to Arjuna's mind.

72

Has it been heard by you, O Pārtha, with an undivided mind? Has your delusion, born of ignorance, been destroyed, O Dhananjaya?

The teacher works hard to explain the scriptures, and the student works hard to understand the teaching. The effort on the part of both aims at the destruction of the student's ignorance.

73

Arjuna said: My delusion is gone. I have regained my memory through Your grace, O Krishna. I am firm; I am free from doubt. I will act according to Your word.

Delusion—Born of ignorance, the cause of the evil of worldly existence.

Memory—Regarding the true nature of the Self.

I am firm—Arjuna is ready to fight to carry out Krishna's command.

The purpose of the study of the scriptures is the destruction of delusion, which is at once followed by Self-knowledge.

The teaching of the Gītā is over. The rest is only the conclusion of the main narrative.

74

Sanjaya said: Thus did I hear this wonderful dialogue between Krishna and the high-souled Arjuna, which caused my hair to rise.

Sanjaya says this to the blind king Dhritarāshtra.

75

Through the grace of Vyāsa I heard this supreme and profound yoga direct from Krishna, the Lord of yoga, Himself teaching it.

Through the grace etc.—Through the grace of the sage Vyāsa, Sanjaya had been endowed with divine vision, by which he observed all that happened between Krishna and Arjuna on the battle-field and reported it to Dhritarāshtra.

Yoga—The Gitā is called "yoga" because it deals with yoga, or the communion of the soul with the Supreme Self.

76

O King, every time I remember this wonderful and sacred dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna, I rejoice again and again and over again.

King—Dhritarāshtra.

77

And as often as I remember that most wonderful form of Krishna, great is my astonishment, O King, and I rejoice again and again.

Form—The Universal Form of Krishna, described in the eleventh chapter of the Gītā.

The outcome of the battle can no longer be doubted.

78

The side that has Krishna, the Lord of yoga, and the side that has Arjuna, the wielder of the Gāndiva—there surely will be fortune, victory, prosperity, and right conduct. Such is my conviction.

Gāndiva—The mighty bow of Arjuna.

Thus in the Bhagavad Gītā, the Essence of the Upanishads, the Science of Brahman, the Scripture of Yoga, the Dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna, ends the Eighteenth Chapter, entitled:

THE WAY TO LIBERATION THROUGH RENUNCIATION

Here ends the Srimad Bhagavad Gītā.
Om. Peace! Peace! Peace be unto all!
Om Tat Sat.

GLOSSARY

A	The first of the Sanskrit letters; all sounds are based on this sound.
Achyuta	(*Lit.*, the Changeless One) An epithet of Krishna.
adharma	(*Lit.*, the opposite of dharma) Impiety or unrighteousness. *See* dharma.
Ādityas	Twelve deities constituting a group.
Airāvata	The name of the celestial elephant born out of the churning of the ocean by the gods and demons and given to Indra for his use.
ākāśa	The first of the five material elements that constitute the universe; often translated as "space" or "ether."
amrita	(*Lit.*, immortal) The elixir of immortality.
apāna	A modification of the vital breath, by the action of which the unassimilated food and drink go downward; the movement of the out-going breath.
asura	Demon.
aśvattha	The holy fig tree.
Aświns	According to Hindu mythology they are the twin sons of the Sun-god, and the physicians of the gods in heaven.
Ātman	The Self, or Soul; denotes also the Supreme Soul, which, according to the Non-dualistic Vedānta, is one with the individual soul.
avidyā	A term of Vedānta philosophy meaning ignorance, either in its cosmic or in its individual form
Bhārata	A descendant of King Bharata, the son of Śakuntalā and Dushyanta. In honour of Bharata, India is called Bhārata or Bhāratavarsha. In the Gītā the word refers occasionally to Dhritarāshtra and frequently to Arjuna, both of whom were descended from the ancient King Bharata.
Brahmā	The Creator God; the First Person of the Hindu Trinity, the other two being Vishnu and Śiva.
brahmachāri	A celibate religious student who lives with his teacher and devotes himself to the practice of spiritual discipline.

Brahman	The Absolute; the Supreme Reality of Vedānta philosophy.
Brahma-sutras	An authoritative text-book on Vedānta philosophy, ascribed to Vyāsa.
brāhmin	The priestly caste.
Brihaspati	The preceptor and priest of the gods.
buddhi	The determinative faculty of the mind, which makes decisions.
conch	The conch-shell, used in India as a trumpet.
cycle	A world period. *See* note on VIII, 17.
Daityas	(*Lit.*, the sons of Diti) The demons, who challenged the power of the gods.
deva	(*Lit.*, shining one) A god. *See* note on III, 11-12.
devarshi	One who is at the same time a god and a rishi, or seer of Truth.
Dhananjaya	A name of Arjuna, given in honour of his having subdued the kings of India and acquired their wealth.
dharma	(*Lit.*, that which holds together) The inmost constitution of a thing, the law of its inner being, which hastens its growth and without which it ceases to exist. The dharma of a man is not imposed from outside, but is acquired by him as a result of his actions in his past lives. Thus every man, in a special sense, has his own dharma, which determines his conduct, his righteousness, and his sense of right and wrong. *See* note on II, 7.
Dhrita-rāshtra	The elder brother of King Pāndu, and the father of one hundred sons, of whom Duryodhana was the eldest.
Draupadi	The wife of the five sons of Pāndu.
Duryodhana	The eldest son of King Dhritarāshtra, and the leader of the Kauravas.
Dvanda	A compound in Sanskrit grammar in which the meanings of the component parts are fully retained, which is not the case with other compounds.
faith	The untranslatable Sanskrit word "śraddhā" denotes an intuitive conviction of the existence of Truth and also a mental attitude, on the part of the aspirant, consisting primarily of sincerity of purpose, humility, and reverence.

Gandharvas — Members of a class of demigods, regarded as the singers and musicians of the gods.

Gāndiva — The celebrated bow of Arjuna.

Garuḍa — A mythical bird, the carrier of the Lord Vishnu.

Gāyatri — A Vedic metre of twenty-four syllables; also the name of a sacred Vedic verse repeated daily by every brāhmin at the time of his regular devotions.

god — The word in Sanskrit is "deva," literally, "shining one." When a human being performs meritorious action on earth, he becomes a god after death and occupies a temporary position in heaven, where he is given charge of a cosmic process. Thus the Hindu scriptures describe the god of fire, the god of wind, the god of the ocean, and so on.

Govinda — (*Lit.*, the Protector of cows) An epithet of Krishna.

Guḍākeśa — (*Lit.*, one who has controlled sleep) An epithet of Arjuna.

guna — According to Sāmkhya philosophy, Prakriti (Nature or matter), in contrast with Purusha (Soul), consists of three gunas—usually translated as "qualities"—known as sattva, rajas, and tamas. Tamas stands for inertia or dullness, rajas for activity or restlessness, and sattva for balance or wisdom.

hathayoga — A school of yoga that aims chiefly at physical health and well-being.

Hrishikeśa — (*Lit.*, the Lord, or Director, of the senses) A name of Krishna.

Ikshvāku — The son of Manu and ancestor of the Solar dynasty of kshatriyas.

Indra — The king of the gods.

Iśvara-form — The Divine Form of the Lord, possessed of omnipotence, omnipresence, infinite wisdom, infinite strength, infinite virtue, and infinite splendour.

Janaka — A king of ancient India, who was endowed with the highest knowledge.

Janārdana — (*Lit.*, the Destroyer of the demon Jana) According to Śankara, an epithet of Krishna because He is prayed to for prosperity and liberation.

japa — Repetition of a name of God.

jiva	(*Lit.*, living being) The individual soul; which in essence is one with the Universal Soul.
jivanmukti	The experience of liberation while one dwells in this world.
jnāna	Knowledge.
jnāni	A man endowed with jnāna, or knowledge.
Kāmadhuk	The famous cow of the sage Vaśishtha, which fulfilled all desires and yielded milk in abundance.
Kandarpa	The Hindu god of love.
Kapila	Reputed to be the author of Sāmkhya philosophy.
karma	Action in general; duty; ritualistic worship.
karmayoga	The path of duty leading to union with the Lord. *See* note on "yoga," II, 39.
karmayogi	A follower of karmayoga. *See* karmayoga.
Kāśi	Benares.
Keśava	A name of Krishna.
Keśi	The name of a demon.
kshatriya	The warrior caste.
Kunti	A wife of King Pāndu; same as Prithā.
Kuru	A section of northern India, comprising the country around modern Delhi; a prince of that country. The epithet "chief of the Kurus" is applied in the Gītā to Arjuna. In the *Mahābhārata* this title is used also to denote Dhritarāshtra and Duryodhana. Kuru was a common ancestor of them all.
Kurukshetra	A place near modern Delhi.
kuśa-grass	A kind of grass from which mats for meditation are made.
Kuvera	The god of riches and treasure; also the king of the Yakshas.
life-breath	Same as prāna. *See* prāna.
Mādhava	A name of Krishna.
Madhusudana	(*Lit.*, the Slayer of the demon Madhu) An epithet of Krishna.
mahāratha	One able to fight single-handed ten thousand archers.
Manu	The celebrated law-giver of ancient India; the name of a mythical personage regarded as the representative man and the father of the human race. The *Manusamhitā*, or *Institutes of Manu*, mentions fourteen Manus, who were the fourteen successive

progenitors or sovereigns of the earth. The seventh Manu, called Vaivasvat, is supposed to have been born of the sun and is regarded as the progenitor of the present race of human beings.

Maruts — The winds.

māyā — A term of Vedānta philosophy denoting ignorance obscuring the vision of God; the cosmic illusion on account of which the One appears as many, the Absolute as the relative. *See* note on VII, 14.

Meru — A mythical mountain abounding in gold and other treasures.

moksha — Liberation.

muni — A sage given to meditation and contemplation.

Nāgas — These form a class of snakes.

Nirvāna — (*Lit.*, blowing out—as of a flame) Annihilation of desire, passion, and ego; liberation characterized by freedom and bliss.

nivritti — Renunciation, detachment.

Om — The most sacred word of the Vedas; also written *Aum.* It is the symbol of both the Personal God and the Absolute. *See* note on VII, 8.

organs of action — They are five in number, namely, hands, feet, the organ of speech, and the organs of generation and evacuation.

pairs of opposites — All correlated ideas and sensations, for instance, good and evil, pleasure and pain, heat and cold, light and darkness.

Pāndava — (*Lit.*, son of Pāndu) Generally used in the text to denote Arjuna.

Pāndu — The younger brother of King Dhritarāshtra and father of Yudhishthira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva.

Pārtha — (*Lit.*, son of Prithā) An epithet of Arjuna.

Patanjali — The celebrated author of *Rājayoga.*

Pitris — Forefathers.

Prahlāda — The son of Hiranyakaśipu, who was an unrighteous demon. Prahlāda was tortured by his father for his great love of God. The Lord, in His Incarnation as Nrisimha, Man-lion, killed the cruel father.

Prajāpati	An epithet of the ten lords of created beings, the first to be created by Brahmā.
Prakriti	Primordial Nature; the material substratum of the creation, consisting of sattva, rajas, and tamas.
prāna	The vital breath, which sustains life in a physical body; the breath. In the books of yoga, prāna is described as having five modifications, according to its five different functions. They are: prāna (the vital energy that controls breath), apāna (the vital energy that carries downward unassimilated food and drink), samāna (the vital energy that carries nutrition all over the body), vyāna (the vital energy that pervades the entire body), and udāna (the vital energy by which the contents of the stomach are ejected through the mouth). According to some writers on yoga, prāna and apāna mean, respectively, the in-going and the out-going breath.
pravritti	Desire, the out-going propensity of the mind.
Prithā	A wife of King Pāndu; same as Kunti.
Purānas	Books of Hindu mythology.
Purusha	(*Lit.*, person) A term of Sāmkhya philosophy denoting the Conscious Principle. The universe evolves from the union of Prakriti (Nature) and Purusha. In Vedānta the word also denotes the Soul and the Absolute.
rajas	*See* guna.
rājayoga	A system of yoga ascribed to Patánjali, dealing with concentration and its methods, control of the mind, samādhi, and similar matters.
Rākshasas	Members of a class of demigods; monsters.
Rik	A part of the Vedas.
Rudras	Members of a group of gods, eleven in number, supposed to be collateral manifestations of Śiva, who is their leader.
sacrifice	The Sanskrit word "yajna" means a religious rite or worship. It also denotes the offering of oblations to God, or any action performed with a spiritual motive. An additional meaning is the Supreme Lord.
Sādhyas	Members of a particular class of celestial beings.
samādhi	Ecstasy, trance, complete concentration, communion with God.

Sāman	A part of the Vedas.
Sāmkhya	One of the six systems of Hindu philosophy, ascribed to Kapila.
samsāra	The relative world.
Sanjaya	The reporter who recounted the progress of the battle of Kurukshetra to the blind King Dhritarāshtra.
sannyāsa	(*Lit.*, complete renunciation) Renunciation practised by sannyāsis, or monks, in the form of giving up all desire for progeny, wealth, and happiness on earth and in heaven after death.
sannyāsi	A Hindu monk, who renounces the world in order to realize God.
Sat	Reality, Existence.
sattva	*See* guna.
Siddhas	Semi-divine beings of great purity and holiness, endowed with supernatural powers.
Śiva	The Destroyer God; the Third Person of the Hindu Trinity, the other two being Brahmā and Vishnu.
Skanda	The commander-in-chief of the armies in heaven.
soma-juice	A beverage made from the soma-plant and used in various Vedic sacrifices.
Śraddhā	*See* faith.
Subhadrā	A wife of Arjuna.
śudra	The labouring caste.
tamas	*See* guna.
twice-born	The members of the three upper castes—brāhmin, kshatriya, and vaiśya—whose second birth is said to take place when they are invested with the sacred thread at the time of initiation into spiritual life.
Uchchaissravas	The name of the kingly horse that came out of the ocean when, according to Hindu mythology, it was churned for the amrita, or elixir of immortality.
upādhis	A term of Vedānta philosophy denoting the limitations imposed upon the Self through ignorance, by which one is bound to worldly life.
Ushmapās	The manes.
Vaiśeshika	One of the six systems of Hindu philosophy, ascribed to Kanāda.
vaiśya	The commercial and agricultural caste.

Vārshneya	(*Lit.*, one belonging to the clan of the Vrishnis) An epithet of Krishna.
Varuna	The lord of the ocean; usually associated with Mitra.
Vāsudeva	(*Lit.*, the Son of Vasudeva) A name of Krishna.
Vasus	Members of a class of deities, usually eight in number.
Vedānta	A system of philosophy discussed mainly in the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gitā, and the Brahma-sutras.
Vedas	The great scriptures of the Hindus and the ultimate authority of the Hindu religion.
Vishnu	(*Lit.*, the All-pervading Spirit) A name of the Supreme Lord; the Second Person of the Hindu Trinity, the other two being Brahmā and Śiva.
Viśwas	Members of a group of deities, ten in number.
Vivasvat	The Sun-god.
Vrikodara	(*Lit.*, one having the belly of a wolf) A name of Bhima, given because of his enormous appetite.
Vyāsa	A celebrated sage, who is reputed to have arranged the Vedas in their present form; he is also believed to be the author of the *Mahābhārata*. The eighteen Purānas and the Brahma-sutras are also ascribed to him.
Yādava	(*Lit.*, One belonging to the race of Yadu) A name of Krishna.
Yādavas	The members of the race to which Krishna belonged.
yajna	*See* sacrifice.
Yajus	A part of the Vedas.
Yakshas	Certain demigods.
Yama	The king of death.
yoga	The union of the individual soul and the Supreme Soul; also the discipline by which such union is effected.
yogi	One who practises yoga. *See* yoga.
Yudhish-thira	The eldest son of King Pāndu.

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